Guitar MAGAZINE

SEPT 2020
ISSUE 384
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ON HIS NEW OD PEDAL

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LIANNE LA HAVAS

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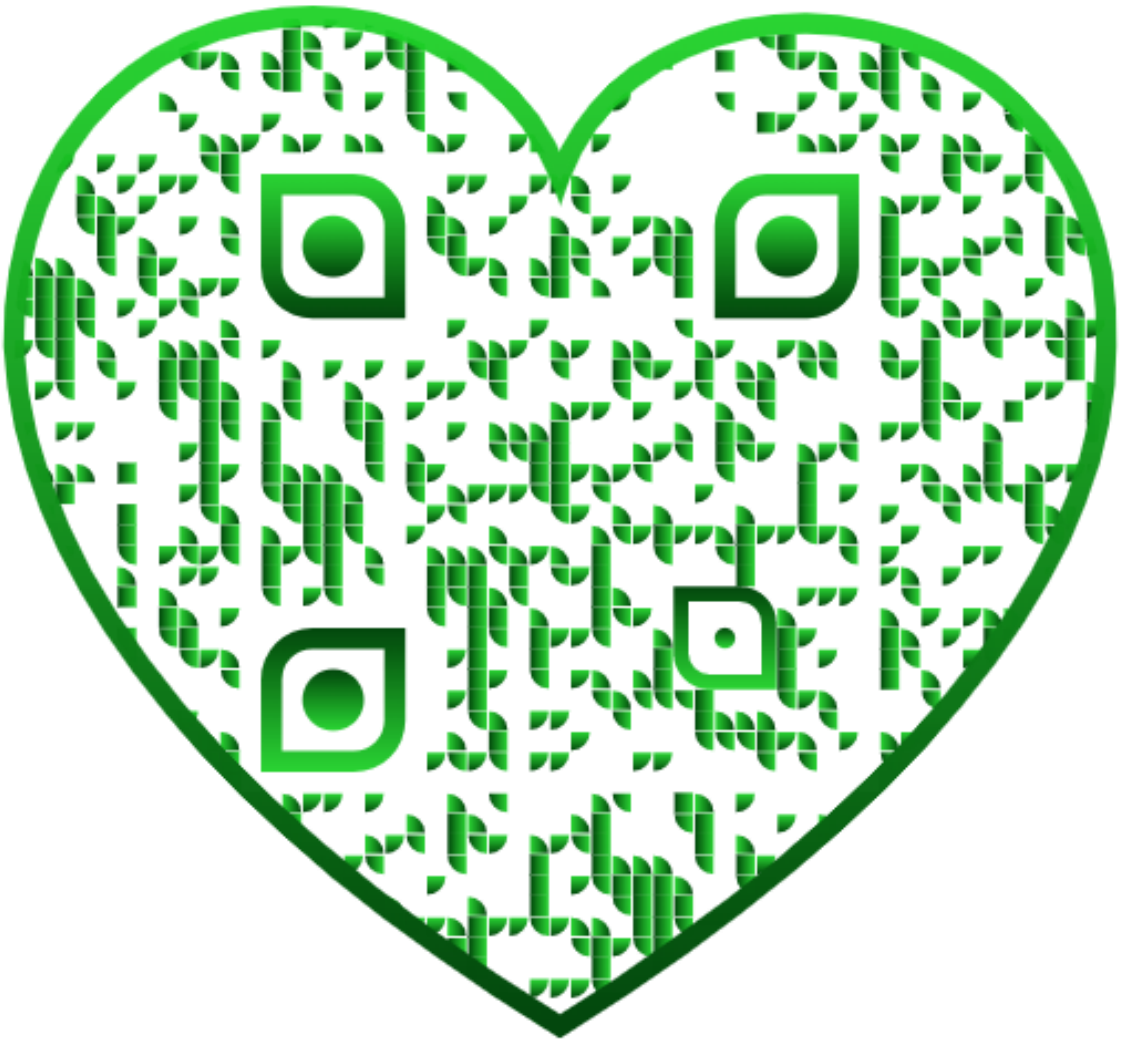
AND MORE



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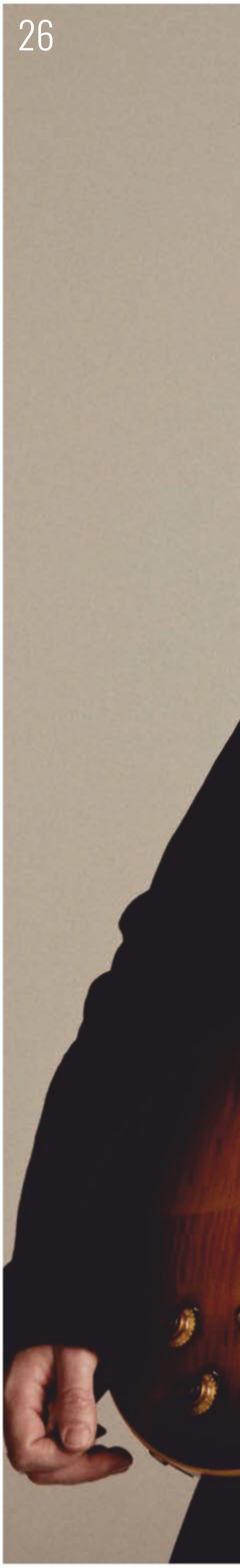
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EDITOR'S LETTER

NEW GENERATION

Where have all the guitar heroes gone? It's a question we still hear people ask on a regular basis but this issue proves that reports of the death of our beloved instrument have been greatly exaggerated. Jason Isbell, Lianne La Havas, Joey Landreth, JD Simo, Madison Cunningham – all musicians for whom the guitar is front and centre in the creative process, and all of whom make their unique voices heard in the following pages.

The recent lockdown has also caused a surge in sales in some areas of the industry, with Gibson recently revealing that the company has been forced to ramp up acoustic guitar production in order to satisfy demand. It's a nice problem to have and it perhaps suggests that, not only have many people returned to the guitar after putting it down when life got in the way, but also that a new generation of players have been picking up the instrument for the first time.

Hopefully, they'll stick with it and we can all help by being inclusive, generous with our time when beginners ask questions, and free from snobbery when it comes to the music they are inspired to play.

This month we also salute two unimpeachable trailblazers in the shape of Jimi Hendrix and the Fender Broadcaster. What would guitar culture and popular music look like without the kinetic influence of Jimi's wonderful playing and the game-changing modular design of Leo's first twin-pickup solidbody? It's impossible to say, of course, but we can dissect their respective geniuses with the benefit of hindsight.

Until next time, then, and once you've pored over the mag from cover to cover, don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* for all the latest news, reviews, interviews and tutorials.

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Matt's lockdown efforts really resonated with us

David hit the bullseye with his top-flight d'Art design

Nick's career experience has served him well

RESO-RECTION

Dear *Guitar.com*, after seeing Chris's call for more reader lockdown guitar projects, I thought I'd share mine with you, made using only parts I had to hand as the lockdown descended. The neck came from a failed attempt to make a pencil guitar, the cone came from an old acoustic someone had (badly) converted into a Dobro.

The body construction is based on the Danelectro frame concept, with ply top and back – again, just bits I had lying around. I'm not sure whether it's a Resocaster or a Telenator but it sounds really cool – and a rose by any other name…

MATT FISHER, VIA EMAIL

WORK OF D'ART

Dear Chris and co, I have just completed my lockdown guitar: an all-mahogany solid electric that I've named d'Art because it looks dart-like, and the Art Deco logo, made from 1mm sterling silver wire inlaid into three-ply plastic, gives it a double meaning.

Influenced by the Burns Flyte design of 1974, I hand-carved it all using basic tools, plus a Japanese saw-file I saw on YouTube how-to videos. Apart from my bench drill and portable jigsaw, the only other power tool I used was a small router I got for the job. I already had some mahogany offcuts, so I bought a neck blank and a rosewood length for the fingerboard. I have built guitars before but always bought necks for them. This time I decided to make my own. I copied the scale from my Fender Jaguar but made the neck a lot deeper, more like an acoustic-electric. It was going to be a bolt-on but I glued it in.

I haven't been playing much for the past two years due to arthritis and trigger finger in my left hand but it's improving slowly. I find the body shape very comfortable to play. and the neck suits my playing style (I'm not a shredder). Now it's time to practise!

DAVID WOODLEY, VIA EMAIL

CHAMBERED MUSIC

Dear *Guitar.com*, I'm 50 years old and have spent half my working life as a mould tool maker. In this line of work, things are very black and white – I used to work to 0.01mm – and 23 years of working like this rubs off on you. This is why, when I decided to have a go at building a kit guitar a few years ago, the process drove me up the wall – and it certainly didn't do anything for my 'OCD of the mm'.

I decided that perhaps I could do a better job and make my own instrument. In the past three years, I've made 15 guitars in my converted garage. This has been an expensive, frustrating, stressful but also rewarding journey. I've learnt something new and pushed myself further with each and every build. I purchase the hardware obviously but everything else I make from scratch.

Because of the medication I have to take, I have had to isolate for the full 12 weeks during lockdown. During this time, I have made a chambered spalted beech S-type guitar with a maple neck and a Chacate Preto fretboard with stainless-steel blind frets. The neck is oiled and the body nitro.

I doubt very much that you would be interested at all, but judging by all the feedback I've received from different guitar groups on Facebook, I believe may have made something a bit special. I wanted to share it as a small success story in all this doom and gloom.

NICK ROGERS, VIA EMAIL

Thanks to Matt, David, Nick and everyone else who sent us pictures and stories of their lockdown guitar projects. It's been fantastic to see something positive come out of this strange time, and we hope that everyone has been able to find solace in the guitar, whether through building, modding or playing.

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ONES TO WATCH

MAYA DELILAH

WORDS SOPHIE WILLIAMS

The London chill-pop guitarist talks Matons, Marshalls, sibling rivalries and her determination to smash guitar stereotypes

Maya Delilah has something to prove. Over the past few years, the London-based self-professed "guitar expert" has been riding a wave of serious hype, thanks to her status as not only a Marshall Spotlight Artist but a BRIT School graduate too.

But the bubbling pressure hasn't held her back. Delilah's debut EP *Oh Boy* is a colourful melange of lo-fi jazz, pop, R&B and ska influences, which come to life via her diaristic, playful songwriting. Its five tracks reveal a self-assured artist ready to take the jump towards singer-songwriter stardom.

We caught up with Delilah to discuss the new release, her blossoming relationship with Marshall and how she is spreading her love of guitar further afield.

When did you start playing guitar?

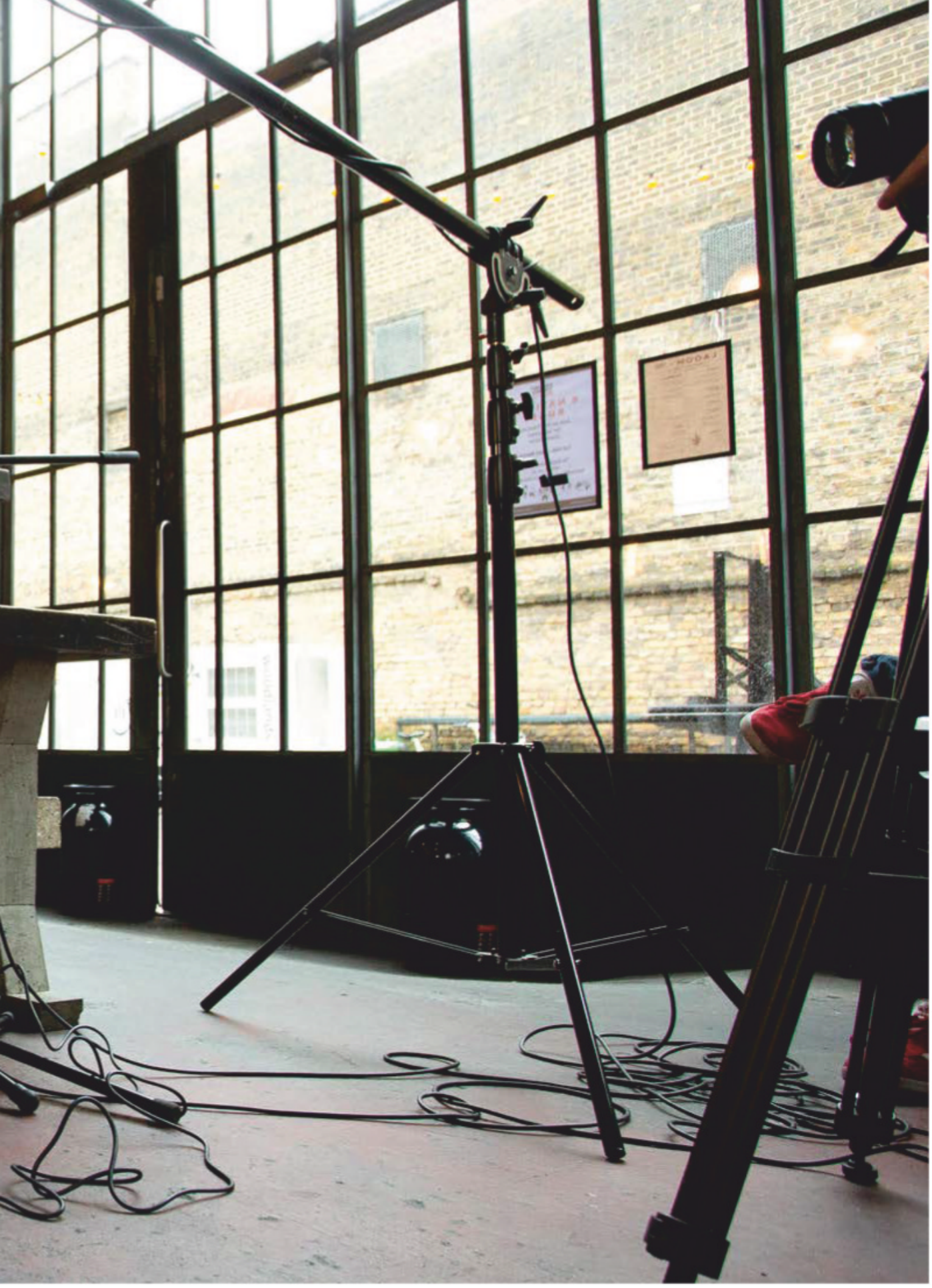
"When I was eight and my sister was 11, we both started guitar lessons. I just thought that the instrument was cool. At the time, it was obviously a bad thing that guitar was seen as a guy's passion but I was really into playing with gender stereotypes as a child. I took piano lessons first but became attracted to the guitar after my sister started playing."

What were your first experiences with guitar like?

"My guitar teacher didn't teach me in a very common way and I was quite stubborn about scales; because I had played piano prior to playing guitar, I knew that scales didn't stick in my head, and I struggled to read sheet music. I asked my teacher if I could pick a song each week and we could learn it, and so whatever I was listening to at the time would be taught back to me."

Was there anyone in your life that encouraged you to pursue the instrument?

"I quickly overtook my sister in terms of playing ability, even though she had been playing guitar for longer than I had. My parents and teachers were all so impressed, and all of that hype and attention made me really want to carry on playing. During secondary school, however, I applied for a music scholarship but I didn't get it, which kind of knocked my confidence a little bit, which made me move into dance for a while.



But I still just wanted to play guitar. I went to the BRIT School to study music at sixth form, and that decision helped me put all my eggs in one basket so that I could focus purely on guitar."

What guitars and effects pedals did you use when recording the EP?

"The guitar that I use the most is a Maton electric semi-hollow, which has this jazzy sound. I bought it about two or three years ago, and it is the only electric guitar I really use. I was very picky and spent seven hours in the shop, so I think they hate me now! I like to use warm, clean reverbs and anything that isn't too distorted. I am also obsessed with building up loads of guitar harmonies, so a lot of the instruments that you hear in my songs and may think are synths or pianos are actually guitar leads. Apart from the drums, most of the instruments on *Tangerine Dreams*, the first song I put out, are guitars."

Over the past year, you have amassed a large online following. Has this added to the pressure of releasing new music?

"The experience has been a strange one. My following started to build when guitar pages started to share my videos and loops. I have always found that my Instagram has been a tricky balance, because I want my followers to know that I am more than just a guitarist; I know that I need to show some personality within my posts because it gives dedicated followers and fans a better insight into who I am. This has been quite difficult, because it's hard to keep the people who just want to listen to your guitar videos engaged, alongside trying to get people to buy your merchandise, come to your shows and listen to your extended musical projects."

You also run Table Time, a series of YouTube videos in which you demonstrate how to improvise and build a track using just a guitar and looper. What was the inspiration behind the series?

"Table Time began because I was getting a lot of comments on my Instagram videos from people who were getting annoyed at the fact that I was only sharing 15-second loops. I did guitar-lesson livestreams for a while when lockdown first started and, as a result, I get a lot of messages on Instagram asking if I am able to do professional guitar lessons. I have always felt like I am not the right person to teach people because I don't know theory, and I learnt the instrument in such an unconventional manner. However, I am looking to do some one-on-one lessons soon in order to raise some money for Black Lives Matter."

In March, you recorded an Artist Spotlight session with Marshall. What has been your experience of working with them?

"It was such a dream come true to do a campaign with Marshall Amps. The team that co-ordinated my campaign were all so lovely. They kindly gifted me an Origin 20C amp, which is now my absolute go-to. I also thought it was pretty cool that they based the majority of the campaign and interview around my artistry, and on me as a guitarist."

You have spoken at length about wanting to combat the stereotype of guitar being primarily an instrument for men. Why is this so important to you?

"I think it's so ridiculous that the guitar is assumed to be a male instrument, and I have had my fair share of sexist comments over the years. From things such as, 'Do you want me to tune your guitar?' to people asking me if I know how to work an amp, and even nastier comments and messages about my abilities. I know first-hand how these experiences can knock young girls' confidence when they're starting out. I want to show girls that they don't need to listen to these stupid comments. I hate how this stereotype even exists in the first place, and I want to help and be part of this change."

What do you hope to achieve following the release of *Oh Boy*?

"I hope that I will be a bit further along in terms of my following, and I want to play more gigs. Before lockdown, it was nice to see strangers coming along to my gigs who had found my work online. I just want my guitar videos to go further afield, and I want to keep helping young girls to play along." G

Oh Boy is out now on Bucks Music Group

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

JD SIMO

JD SIMO

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The Nashville-based guitar-slinger details his favourite guitar parts on his new LP, where influences range from Eddie Hazel's fuzzed-out funk to the call-and-response of Curtis Mayfield

After a rare break from his relentless touring schedule – which saw him play more than 150 shows in 2019 – JD Simo found the time to quickly assemble an eight-track home studio in which to record his sophomore record. Helmed by Eddie Spear, who has also worked with industry stalwarts Chris Stapleton and Rival Sons, Simo quickly assembled the LP in just three days back in January. Recorded directly to tape, it's unsurprisingly inundated with far-out guitar lines that draw on disparate influences, from Eddie Hazel to Cornell Dupree and everybody inbetween. "It's a bridge," says Simo, "between R&B and psychedelic rock."

Following his acclaimed 2019 solo debut *Off At 11*, Simo's self-titled follow-up saw him working with a producer for the first time. "Eddie really tore the initial ideas apart and rearranged them," he says. "It's impossible to be completely objective by yourself, no matter how many records you've made or have been a part of."

Simo's collaborative work prior to his solo records primed him for this new genre-hopping statement. Playing hundreds of shows every year, his work with the likes of Tommy Emmanuel, Jack White and Luther Dickinson has had an undeniable influence on his expressive and varied playing style too. Here, Simo details the five best guitar parts on his new album.

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

"The rhythm parts are inspired by Phil Upchurch and Cornell Dupree. It's that lovely major seventh R&B thing that so many of my favourite records are based around. A lot of the answer lines are in that Curtis Mayfield type of call-and-response style. I could play it all day. The solo is a whole different animal. It's mostly inspired by John Frusciante's fragmented solo style – which I love – meaning that it's not linear. The phrasing is all over the place and the harmonic structure is not linear either. I just did several passes and chose my favourite."

LOVE

"The basic groove is in the style of James Brown, Jimmy Nolen and Catfish Collins. I played it super-light to give it that liquid feel. The pre-chorus riff is straight out of my love of Funkadelic and, in particular, the fuzzy stylings of Eddie Hazel. Some might think Jimi Hendrix but I'm thinking Eddie. Listen to *Maggot Brain*, folks. The solo is probably the wildest I've ever done. We ran my guitar through tons of outboard gear until it sounded exciting. I'm not even sure what we ended up using. Then again, I played in a very non-linear way. I was sort of thinking like a keyboard or synth player. In my mind, I was thinking of Tom Morello or Chick Corea."

ANNA LEE

"This one was so fun. I played a pawnshop guitar through an old boombox and we manipulated the varispeed on the tape machine to flutter and fluctuate the pitch throughout. We then sync'd two separate takes, one on the left and one on the right, and mixed them together. It's a super-whacked-out take on an old Robert Nighthawk song that I learnt from Earl Hooker. In my mind, it's like a White Album take on the blues."

TAKE THAT

"This was recorded all on one mic, in a tiny isolation booth. I wanted to do a zippy, quick shredder but do it in a way that was sort of a joke: super-fast, super-quick, one mic, little thought. I've always wanted to include some sort of chicken-picking thing but it never seems to fit on my records and I really don't want to write a song specifically for that because I think that'd be jive. This served the purpose. It doesn't take itself seriously and it fits well."

HELP

"This was a blast to play. I tuned way down to B on my old Jazzmaster. This is a stoner-rock plea for fucking help. I myself am in recovery and this is the primal speak of my experience. The guitar is low, dirty and raw throughout. I can hear myself screaming though it. The track is influenced by Nine Inch Nails, Nirvana and Dinosaur Jr. I wanted a really raw track that had nothing pretty about it. One take with live vocals. There you have it."

***JD Simo* is out 21 August on Crows Feet Records**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

BEABADOOBEE
Care

The first taste of rising indie-rock guitar star Beabadoobee's debut album sounds like something lifted from a 1990s teen-movie soundtrack, with slick and shiny guitar, and a searing solo. College-rock bliss.

JOE BONAMASSA
Cradle Rock

For the 20th anniversary of his debut album, Bonamassa dug out the original masters for a remix and re-recorded the vocals. It's easy to see why this opening track was a precursor to big things.

MILDLIFE
Rare Air

Heavenly Recording's latest band have announced their forthcoming sophomore album with a video for the single *Rare Air*, which boasts groovy smooth-jazz verses akin to Steely Dan and Robert Fripp.

SG GOODMAN
If It Ain't Me Babe

The latest single from SG Goodman's forthcoming debut LP, produced by Jim James, was penned at Joshua Tree in 2018 and opens with beautiful tremolo guitar. Nashville vibes abound.

DECLAN MCKENNA
Daniel, You're Still a Child

The precocious guitarist returns with the latest single from his new album *Zeros*. It's full of brash auto-wah guitar underpinned by grandiose piano parts and a synth-heavy chorus.

KEYS
This Side Of Luv

Recorded on four-track cassette recorders during the lockdown, the Welsh quintet capture the essence of 1970s Midlands pop music, with sprawling chord progressions and simmering guitars.

HAIM
Gasoline

Heard on the LA trio's genre-bending third LP *Women In Music Pt III*, the latest single was premiered via a live performance on Instagram, and features raked Strat tones interlaced with jaunty, parlour-style piano.

THE ROLLING STONES
Criss Cross

An unearthed track from the *Goats Head Soup* sessions, *Criss Cross* will appear on the new deluxe version of their 1973 LP, which will feature bonus tracks, alternative versions and other never-before-heard songs.

BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD
Stockholm City Rock

Cardiff's Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard continue their classic-rock revival with the latest single from their superlative *The Non-Stop EP*. The raving-mad track embodies a mad fusion of Marc Bolan and Spinal Tap.

BILL FRISELL
Keep Your Eyes Open

Originally appearing on his 1997 album *Nashville*, this classic recording has been reimagined for new album *Valentine*, and is based around an ensemble with collaborators Thomas Morgan and Rudy Royston.

GARDENING
Second Sight

The second single from the band formerly known as Mirror Shot features breezy guitars and a gunshot snare. Recorded using a worn 1960s Jazzmaster and a Les Paul Goldtop, it brings to mind Sundara Karma.

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD
Honey

The Aussie psych-rockers' first new release of 2020 features the band's now characteristic microtonal approach, albeit acoustically. It also boasts some sultry Mellotron tones to enhance the hazy vibe.

WIN A MANSON META SERIES MBM-1
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Matt Bellamy's purchase of Manson Guitar Works last year caused a huge stir in the guitar world. The first fruits of the Muse man's ownership of the company he's been associated with for two decades is the Meta Series MBM-1, a signature model that offers Matt's hot-rodded T-style proclivities for an accessible price.

Manufactured in partnership with Cort, the MBM-1 boasts a basswood body, a maple neck and a hardtail tune-o-matic bridge, as well as a pair of Manson humbucking pickups and even a killswitch. This guitar is certainly ready to rock, then, but the newly improved V-shaped neck offers comfort and playability in spades too.

We were hugely impressed when we reviewed the MBM-1 recently, describing it as "a mean and masterful rock guitar that thrives on a high-gain diet". To be in with a chance of winning one in striking Starlight Silver, head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck!

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INTRODUCING...

MADISON CUNNINGHAM

The Californian songwriter's major-label debut *Who Are You Now* has marked her out for big things indeed. But it all began with a desire to "not sound totally annoying" on guitar. We caught up with the 24-year-old to talk metaphorical Ferraris, her fondness for Jazzmasters and obsession with crappy acoustic guitars, plus why she's learnt that her playing needs to "say something important, rather than impressive"

WORDS JOSH GARDNER
PORTRAITS CLAIRE MARIE VOGEL

What were you doing when you were 23? You probably weren't making Grammy-nominated albums. But then, Madison Cunningham isn't your average twenty-something. The Costa Mesa native might have only that album, *Who Are You Now*, and her 2014 indie debut *Authenticity* under her belt, but the now-24-year-old's star was on the rise long before she received a nod for Best Americana Album from the Academy back in January. She played the iconic Newport Folk Festival last year, and no less than John Mayer has heaped praise on Cunningham's intricate jazz-inflected guitar work, which pulls inspiration from Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell one minute, Jeff Buckley the next.

Despite all this, the Grammy nod came very much out of the blue. "It was completely unexpected!" says Cunningham from her home in Los Angeles in April. "A lot of people had been stressing to me, 'Your debut record on a major label is a big statement, it's your first impression, and you have to figure out what you want that to be'. I think I put a lot of pressure on myself to figure that out. I was more like, 'I've really got to dig deeper and figure out what the heck I actually want to say with my songwriting voice', because that's a big deal.

"I think, in some ways, all the pressure that I had felt up until the moment we released the record… the Grammy nomination served to alleviate all that. I was like, 'Oh, what we did and what we worked for was a good thing'. That's not to say that the Grammys are the final word on what's good and what's not but it changed things in the sense that I didn't think that the Academy would notice a record like this."

GARAGE BAND

Notice they certainly did – and it's not hard to understand why. Cunningham is a rare talent who combines inventive and at times exhilarating guitar playing with old-soul vocals and incisive and original songwriting. But the current acclaim she's starting to enjoy is the culmination of a lifetime's obsession with playing guitar, though the precise start-point remains a little contentious.

"My dad would say that I started writing songs when I was about four but I have heard those songs, and I beg to differ," says Cunningham, with a laugh. "My dad was a guitar player actually, and seeing the way he loved it made it exciting. He had a full-time job – he was a worship leader at a church – but when he would come home, all he wanted to do was play. He kept his electric guitar almost hidden in the garage but I was home-schooled, so while he was gone I would sneak in there. I really liked playing with pedals and experiencing the power of turning on an amp. It was so fun to me."

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“I WANTED TO GO TO LA. I WANTED TO GO TO A CLUB AND PLAY THERE OR PLAY A BAR WHERE NO-ONE’S LISTENING. I WANTED ALL OF THAT, IT SEEMED VERY ROMANTIC TO ME”

Despite her initial infatuation with plugging in, after six years of strumming an acoustic, Cunningham found the initial transition to being an electric player at about the age of 13 something of a struggle, until she began to appreciate the beauty in difference.

“The thing that really clicked in my head was the realisation that there were two very different approaches to playing those two instruments,” she explains. “And then the differences between them were established in my head, and I saw them in the way you’d differentiate between a viola and a cello. It felt like I was learning an instrument all over again.

“I went through a period of feeling a little insecure because I was just strumming on an acoustic – I wasn’t really fingerpicking or doing much of that – so it felt like, ‘Oh, I need to brush up in order to not sound totally annoying on this amplified instrument’. So I don’t think I felt quite at home with the electric guitar right away. It felt like sitting behind the wheel of a really powerful car and being like, ‘I don’t know if this is the right look for me or if I should even be driving a Ferrari’.

“So it took me a minute to figure it out and find my own voice. Because the way I knew the electric guitar was basically through blues, which is incredible but I also felt intimidated by that. I was excited but also intimidated as a songwriter by the challenge of trying to figure out how all of those worlds meshed. I think that created a very quirky, sideways way of me coming into it – just making mistakes and calling them songs.”

IN THE WOODSHED

Listening to Cunningham’s playing, which effortlessly fuses jazzy lead lines, bluesy riffs, altered tunings and towering picked arpeggios drenched in vintage tremolo and reverb, you’d be forgiven for thinking that her broad style was borne of years of tutored study. It sprung, however, from very little formal training, the odd bit of occasional fatherly advice, and total devotion to her instrument.

“I was just obsessed with it,” she says. “I would just sit in a little corner of the house for hours and figure things out. My dad taught me my first seven chords.

Madison's Fender Classic Player Jazzmaster Special may be humble but it's her favourite guitar

It became a really cool relationship because I started to go into areas that he'd maybe never gone before. Danny Donnelly – who was one of my dad's really close friends and the first person I ever heard talk about the pentatonic scale, and open tunings and all that – he gave me one lesson maybe. But, for the most part, I've been self-taught. I grew up driving out to LA and watching some of the greats play, and I think, in a subconscious way, they were also my teachers, just by hearing and watching the way they held and played their instruments."

The real lightbulb moment, however, came when she discovered Adam Levy, the LA jazz guitarist whose understated playing formed a beguiling counterpoint to Norah Jones across her mega-platinum album run in the first decade of the 2000s.

"He's still in LA and he continues to be one of the most fluid and incredible guitar players out there," enthuses Cunningham. "His playing sounds like a voice more than it does five fingers, and that cracked my wide head open in terms of, 'Oh, there are other ways to play this instrument guitar'. I'd been in my own box, trying to grab onto whatever I could and find a way to *be* a guitar player. Like I said, I was trying not to be annoying!

"I was amazed by how little he played and how much he said with that restraint, and that changed my perspective. I think that when you're young, you want to be impressive, and you think that the only way to be impressive is through quantity. How many notes can I play? How can I sound like I am, for a lack of a better word, a shredder? But watching Adam Levy – there was so much humility and grace in his playing and it got to me so much more than anything else had up until that point.

"I started taking major cues from that and figuring out how I could pull back on some areas, so that I could say something that was maybe important, rather than impressive. I think there's a difference, and that's not to say that I have found a way to say something important but I feel like I'm always struggling and wanting to say something like that, something different."

STEPPING OUT

As someone whose day job was getting up in front of a congregation and playing music, it didn't take long for Madison's father to recognise her talent. But, as an introverted teenager wary of trying anything beyond writing songs in her room, she needed a little push.

"I was fortunate enough to have people around me who pushed me to get outside of my comfort zone," she recalls. "He had me sing with him at church, which was kind of my first experience of being in front of an audience, being in front of people."

Singing with her dad and her five sisters gave Cunningham a taste for live performance. But the lights of that nearby metropolis proved far too tempting to ignore.

"HONESTLY, THE CRAPPIER THE ACOUSTIC, THE MORE I'M DRAWN TO IT. THERE ARE A LOT OF SONGS IN THOSE HOMELY GUITARS"

ABOVE Cunningham performing with multi-instrumentalist and frequent collaborator Andrew Bird in New York, 2019

"By the time I was 17, I knew I wanted to play my own music outside of church, and I wanted to go to LA," says Madison. "That was the pipe dream. I wanted to go to a club and play there or play a bar where no one's listening. I wanted all of that and it all seemed very romantic to me. But I was nervous and really, really introverted, and I don't know if I would ever have done it unless someone had set it up and been like, 'You should do this. Come on, it's going to be okay'."

Meeting musician and producer Tyler Chester – who has worked with the likes of Margaret Glaspy, Switchfoot and Andrew Bird, and has produced every record Madison has made since – when she was 18 would be the catalyst for her dream. Tyler helped get Cunningham her first LA gig at Largo, the iconic comedy and music venue in Hollywood that has played host to the likes of Elliot Smith, Larry David, Ben Folds, Jack Black and scores of others over its 30-year existence.

"As a musician, to watch a comedian try out their new bits is mind-blowing," she says of her first time at the theatre. "It's hard to imagine trying to make people laugh for a living. It looks so hard! But it makes for a cool merging of worlds inside LA's artistic community.

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“I’VE TAKEN WHAT I LEARNT FROM CHURCH CULTURE AND APPLIED THAT TO THE SHOWS. IT MAKES ME FEEL MORE RELAXED WHEN THERE’S THIS SENSE OF, ‘OH, THIS ISN’T ALL ABOUT ME. MUSIC IS THE GREATER PURPOSE HERE’”

After that night, I started to play a lot at Largo and around town. It was a special time and I miss it.”

Going from respectful suburban church audiences to the uber-hip and heckle-heavy cabaret crowds of LA must have been quite the culture shock, surely? Perhaps not.

“I realised that the response is different from the audience but, as the person onstage, you have to treat it as a similar kind of deal,” Cunningham notes. “It has to be like giving up yourself to the music and making it so it’s not about you, so that the performance can serve its purpose as best it can. So I’ve taken what I learnt from church culture and tried to apply that to the shows, because that just frees me up, and it makes me feel more relaxed when there’s this sense of, ‘Oh, this isn’t all about me. Music is the greater purpose here right now’. It’s relieving.”

© Jim Spellman / Getty Images

THE OFF SET

When you press play on *Who Are You Now*, it’s extremely difficult to resist being drawn in by the syncopated groove of opening track *Pin It Down*. As album introductions go, it’s a particularly impressive statement of intent – but it’s one that came quite late to the party.

“That was the song that came last, and I thought it was the song I’d been searching for the whole time,” says Madison. “It just had the elements that made me feel like, ‘Okay, this is what I want to be as a musician, and this is how I want to incorporate melody and guitar’.”

Integral to proceeedings are the woody, breaking-up tones of her Fender Classic Player Jazzmaster. It’s a humble guitar to make a Grammy-nominated record on but it’s one Madison can’t seem to put down.

“Of the three I have, for some reason I just prefer my Mexican Jazzmaster,” she says. “It might be a sentimental thing, because that was the first one that I ever had, but it just doesn’t feel as new as the other ones. Also, my white American Vintage Jazzmaster needs a little work, because it buzzes out. It might be that I’ve put too much pressure on it as a result of detuning it so many times – that one might be on me! But the Mexican Jazzmaster just feels warmer, yet it can be brighter when it needs to be. It feels very well-rounded.

“Jazzmasters hold low tunings well, so given the way that I’ve been writing songs – with open tunings and lowered tunings – I’ve stuck with Jazzmasters,” Madison continues. “I had started using open tunings on acoustic but when I tried it on electric, something just clicked. I don’t think it had occurred to me that I could do that for some reason. Maybe it was a moment of boredom or me just wanting to try something new. I guess it’s pretty basic and a lot of people had thought of it before but I was like, ‘Oh, this has a different sound than it does on acoustic’.”

Another thing that Jazzmasters do with aplomb is add shimmer and depth to glassy picked arpeggios, which can be heard to wonderful effect on *Something To Believe In*, a song that shows hints of one of Cunningham's strongest influences, Jeff Buckley.

"I probably heard Buckley when I was about 17 and I didn't like him the first time I listened to him," she says. "But I've found that, with many of my favourite records, the first time I listen to them, I have a negative reaction. I think Buckley flipped a few things that I had been familiar with on their heads, and that was offensive to my ears or something. But then all of a sudden it clicked and I just thought it was the most incredible thing I'd ever heard. It haunted me. *Grace* ended up melting in my car's CD player – because I live in California and it's so hot. I played it over and over until it had its final day in the sun."

PARLOUR GAMES

When it comes to acoustic guitars, Madison's primary live and recording instrument remains the Martin that she's had since the very beginning of her playing days. Her favourite, however, is something a lot less reliable and a lot less prestigious.

"My number-one probably shouldn't be my number-one because it's kind of crappy," she says, with a chuckle. "It's an old parlour guitar but I love it. Honestly, the crappier the acoustic guitar, the more I'm drawn to it. I love the shakiness of it and how the strings are always buzzing. I don't know – it just has a sound to it, like it's grungy or something. There are a lot of songs in those homely guitars."

When it comes to amps, Madison favours the consistency and practicality of modern Fender Deluxe Reverbs and Princetons. But her heart again belongs to something that isn't exactly road-ready.

"I really love the Gibson Falcon," she says, enthusiastically. "It's amazing. It's the only vintage amp I have and it's my favourite. But I can't travel with it, and it's hard to play live because it's really low wattage, so it crunches quickly. I just use it for recording – the tremolo on it is amazing. I tried using it live once and totally broke it and had to get it fixed. You live and you learn!"

Another quirk of Cunningham's setup is her small pedalboard, which features primarily JHS pedals, including the Panther Cub, Tidewater, and Emperor.

"When we were recording the last record, Tyler reached out to JHS and asked if they would give us a couple of pedals to explore," she explains. "They were so generous and gave us way more than we needed, so we just tried them all. Then I started talking with Josh and I realised that I'd got really attached to a lot of sounds they were making. So he made me a pedalboard that's all JHS. It's versatile but also small and easy to travel with. All I was really looking for was to have a few tricks but not have to pack a whole new suitcase.

"I see some people's boards and they're half the size of a console. That's crazy to me. That must break your back! Travelling with two guitars in one case is enough. There's less room for error with fewer pedals too. If you've just got six pedals, there's not much that can really go wrong with that setup."

HOMEWARD BOUND

Time at home is traditionally a precious commodity for musicians but, as COVID-19's gig-postponing effects drag on and on, it's little wonder that so many artists are yearning to get back in front of live audiences.

"I really started to miss it this week," says Madison. "It's hard to imagine that just a couple of weeks ago, I was complaining about travelling and missing home. I take it all back!"

The pandemic has already seen Cunningham's planned tour in support of Mandy Moore postponed, and the status of her stint supporting former One Direction megastar Harry Styles at the end of the year is murky at best. Mercifully, though, there's one thing that COVID can't cancel.

"I was set to be home and writing a new record anyway so, in a lot of ways, this is kind of my plan," she shrugs. "But, at the same time, this is just a little different than my plan – I didn't wish for this! We live in Los Angeles near the landing path for LAX. We watch the planes make big U-turns over our little hill and I'm always like, 'Take me with you! I want to be in the sky again!'" G

Who Are You Now is out now on Verve Forecast/UMG

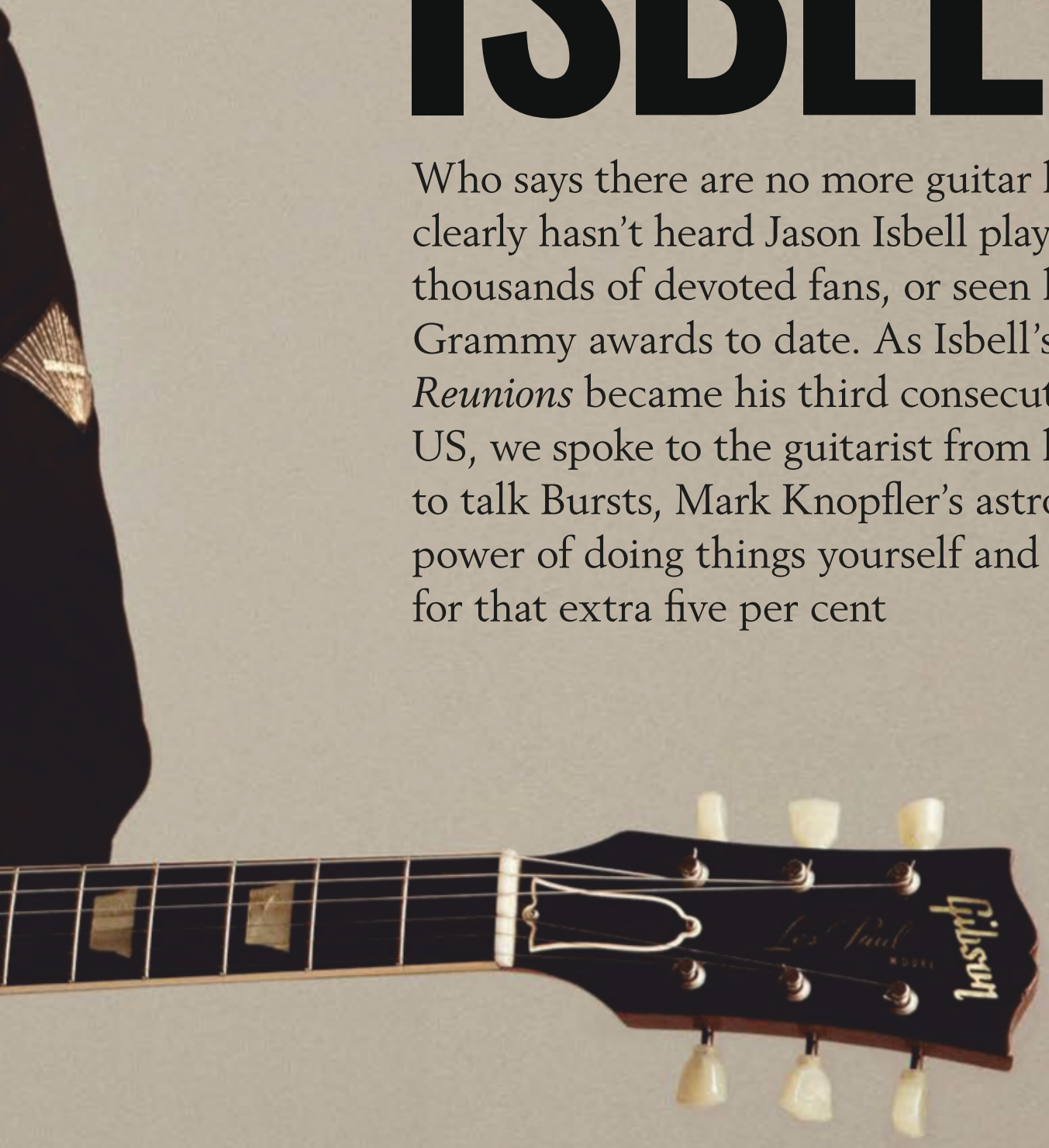
FACING PAGE Madison leans heavily on Jazzmasters as they cope better with her multiple altered tunings

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

JASON ISBELL

WORDS JOSH GARDNER
PORTRAITS ALYSSE GAFKJEN

Who says there are no more guitar heroes? Anyone who does clearly hasn't heard Jason Isbell play, watched him captivate thousands of devoted fans, or seen him pick up one of his four Grammy awards to date. As Isbell's seventh studio album *Reunions* became his third consecutive top 10 record in the US, we spoke to the guitarist from his home outside Nashville to talk Bursts, Mark Knopfler's astronaut tendencies, the power of doing things yourself and why he's always looking for that extra five per cent



Jason Isbell should have nothing left to prove. If you'd bagged a pair of Grammys and a spot in the Billboard top 10 album charts for your past two albums – 2015's *Something More Than Free* and 2017's *The Nashville Sound* – while building an army of remarkably passionate fans, you'd be pretty confident of your own brilliance, right? But for the 41-year-old former Drive-By Trucker, the picture was very different as he attempted to craft his seventh solo album, *Reunions*. In fact, so tortured was its gestation that Isbell admits it even strained his relationship with his wife, musician Amanda Shires. Nothing left to prove? Hardly.

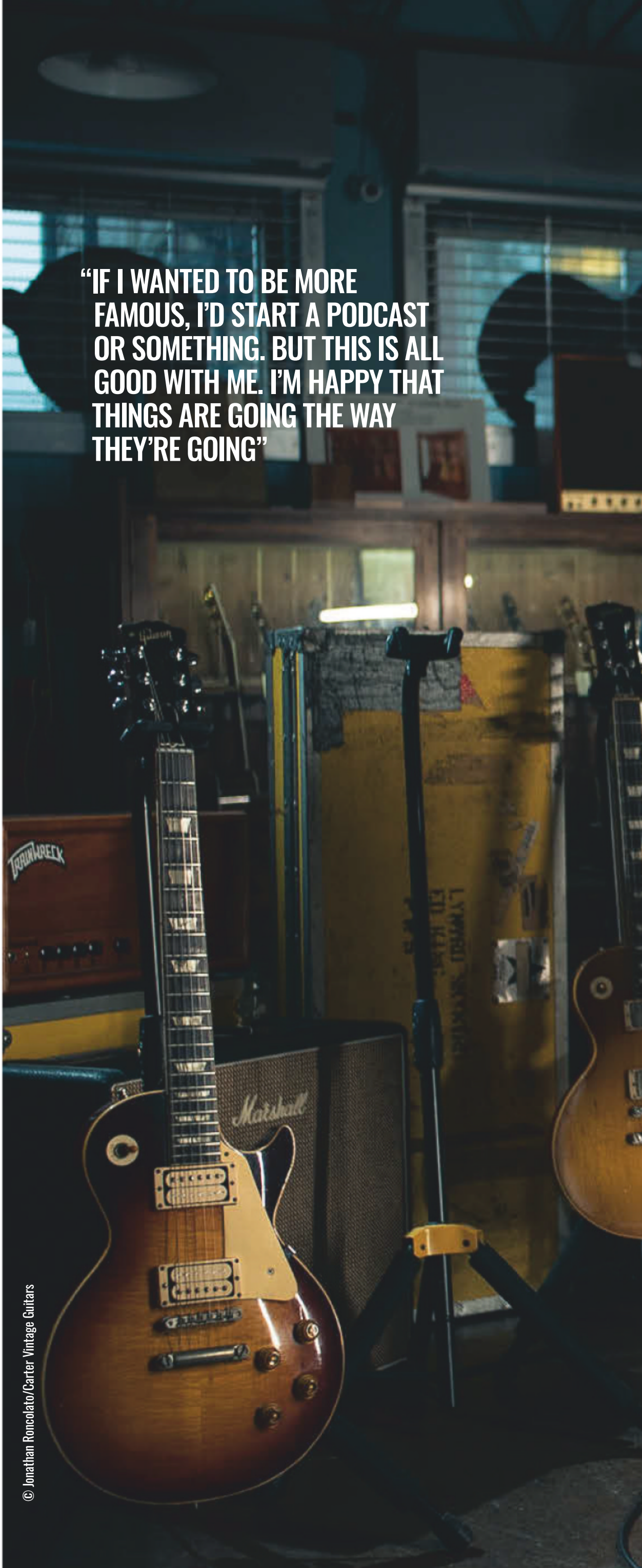
"I think it was the opposite," says Isbell, with a soft Alabama drawl. "That was causing pressure for me. I still don't think that I've done my absolute best work. I guess some of it is probably me trying to prove to other people that it wasn't a fluke – and I don't know when that stops. When do you start thinking, 'Okay, it's not a fluke?' I don't know.

"I just didn't want to let everybody down. I didn't want to come into a project without having done my homework, without having strong songs and enough material to make a strong album. I didn't want there to be any filler. We don't have a lot of casual fans – either they don't listen to our music at all or they pore over each individual lyric and sound. I like that. I would rather it be that way. But it makes you think, 'Okay, I can't get away with anything!'"

Isbell might be the last person on Earth who thinks this is all still a fluke but what's less surprising is how forthright he is about his struggles with that impulse. Part of what makes Isbell's music so engaging is the unflinching honesty he brings to his songs, whether that be his battles with alcoholism or his relationship issues. It's something that, even 13 years into his solo career, he's still wrestling with.

"I'm not necessarily comfortable with it," he reflects. "But one of the things that I was able to recognise early on is that I'm good at being honest, and that I'm at my best when I'm at my most honest. It's still a challenge for me to get over these ideas of public perception and privacy though. Every time I write one of these songs, I think to myself, 'I don't know if I want to tell people about that'. But I have a rule: if it feels like that, if it's a challenge to reveal something, then I have to figure out a way to do it. I can't throw that away, because that's what I do best. I tell people the truth."

This spirit of truth-telling clearly resonates with people on a profound level. As the man says, he doesn't have many casual fans, and it's this passionate support that continues to drive his success. You won't often see Isbell's music on the high-profile streaming playlists that are so crucial to an artist's success in 2020 but *Reunions* still hit the US top 10 when it was released in May, something he attributes solely to the devotion of his fanbase.



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"The record was at number nine on the Billboard charts in the US but we sold twice as many as the number one in terms of actual sales," Isbell observes. "But I don't look at that and think, 'Oh, man, we should be number one'. I don't give a shit! Instead I think, 'People bought these fucking records with money, with real money, and that's awesome – and I don't have to give it all to a record label'."

Isbell has self-released all his music since 2013's *Southeastern*, and he's under no illusions that the decision to go it alone has been hugely impactful on the way his career has turned out.

"It enables me to do all of the things that I'm able to do creatively," he insists. "It just depends on what you want. If you want to be a celebrity, then you probably shouldn't start your own record label. But that was never one of my goals. If I wanted to be more famous, I'd start a podcast or something. But this is all good with me. I'm happy that things are going the way they're going.

"I just always wanted to be able to make the music that I wanted to make, and to have enough money to buy cool guitars. That's pretty much it. I wanted to be able to have a crew that was consistent and did a good job, and wanted to have a fairly comfortable place to live, and I wanted to be able to buy some ridiculous fucking guitars.

"That's been the best thing about selling my own records and owning my own publishing. Everybody's like, 'How the hell are you able to afford this guitar?' and I'm like, 'Well, because I'm not giving all my money to Columbia Records!'"

REDEYE FLIGHT

When Jason Isbell talks about "ridiculous fucking guitars," there's usually one instrument in particular that he has on his mind. Redeye is a 1959 Gibson Les Paul, serial number #9-0891. It was owned for decades by Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist Ed King until his death in 2018, and is named after the distinctive patch of unfaded red finish above its neck pickup. In January 2019, Isbell became its new custodian. Becoming a proud member of the '59 Owners Club, however, wasn't quite what Isbell had planned when he came home for Christmas in 2018. But these things have a way of sneaking up on us.

"I wasn't looking for one and I always thought that I would never have one, because, obviously, they are *ridiculously* expensive," says Isbell, with a chuckle. "I've got this '61 ES-335 that I've had for quite a few years. It's a fantastic instrument that'll hold its own against pretty much anything. I always thought, 'Ah I don't need a Burst, I've got this guitar. This will do everything I want to do!'

FACING PAGE Jason Isbell playing with his band The 400 Unit at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium, 2019

BELOW The 400 Unit, from left to right: Derry DeBorja, Jimbo Hart, Amanda Shires, Jason Isbell, Sadler Vaden, Chad Gamble

“THE KLON CENTAUR IS FIVE PER CENT BETTER THAN EVERYTHING ELSE, AND ONCE YOU HEAR THAT FIVE PER CENT, YOU’RE FUCKED”

“But then I was home for Christmas and New Year’s in 2018, and Christie Carter from Carter Vintage Guitars called me. Ed had passed away the previous August, and his wife Sharon had brought in a bunch of his guitars to sell through the shop. So she called and said, ‘Would you come in and demo some of these guitars for our website?’ I said, ‘Yeah, sure I’d love to’. So I went in and played the *Sweet Home Alabama* Strat, which was a ’73 or ’74 Strat. But then they had Redeye sitting on a stand next to it. So I said, ‘Is that the real guitar or is that one of the Collector’s Choice reissues?’ and she’s like, ‘No, that’s the one’. I was shocked!

“So I picked it up and played it, and before I’d even plugged in, I just knew I was done for. It just vibrated. It was really resonant all the way through the guitar and it’s just so beautiful. I plugged it in and played it and I got lost on the way home. I stopped and got a bottle of water at a gas station and when I got home, it was still unopened. I couldn’t get to sleep at night. I was just thinking about that guitar.”

Anyone who’s been privileged enough to play a ’59 will likely recognise that feeling but, for most of us, six-figure price tags are always going to be a stumbling block to tonal nirvana. But where there’s a will, there’s a way.

“It was way out of my price range,” he admits. “I called my accountant and she’s like, ‘No, that’s a ridiculous idea!’ and hung up. So I called my manager and said, ‘I need you to find me enough private gigs this year so that I can pay for this guitar and it won’t affect anybody but me – not my family, not my crew’.

“So I played a bunch of weird-ass birthday parties for Bitcoin people and in conference rooms for Viacom. Stuff like that. It was so strange but it was well worth it. I sit down with that guitar just about every day and it’s just unreal.

“The first things I learnt on electric guitar were those Skynyrd songs that Ed played on, and the early Skynyrd recordings happened in my hometown, so it was a special thing for me. Also, the fact that Ed was the outsider in the bunch – he was the hippy amid the rednecks – appeals to me, because I grew up in Alabama and I felt like the hippy among the rednecks for most of my life.”

SCHOOL’S IN

So what happens when you become the owner of a Burst? Most of us would get some buddies around and see what this thing can do. Isbell was no different but when one of your buddies is Dave Cobb, Grammy-winning producer and current resident of Nashville’s RCA Studio A, you have some unique options.

“I got that guitar on New Year’s Day last year,” he recalls. “I called Dave immediately. He was like, ‘Meet me at the studio right now’. I drove to RCA and he had all the rigs laid out. ‘Right, here’s *Zeppelin II*’ and he’s got all these little Supros. ‘Here’s *Zeppelin III*’ and they brought out the Plexi. We just went through every track. It was like we were 15 years old.”

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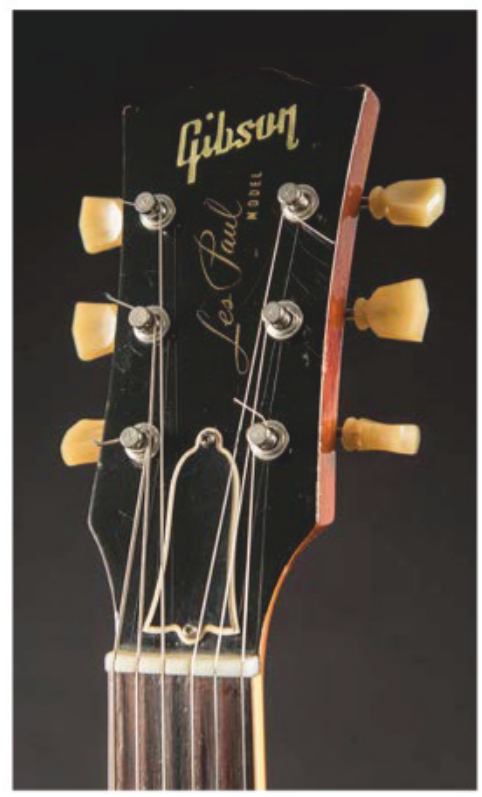
Redeye images reproduced with kind pemission of Jonathan Roncolato and Carter Vintage Guitars. Find out more at cartervintage.com

'Redeye', named for the red area above the neck pickup, was owned by Lynyrd Skynyrd's "hippy outsider" Ed King but is now Isbell's prized possession



Isbell playing his 1961 Gibson ES-335 in 2019

© Erika Goldring / Getty Images

The more time Isbell spends with Redeye, however, the more he becomes aware that there's something unquantifiable that makes those original Bursts so special.

"Until I got this guitar, I would have been one of those people who said, 'Ah, there are a lot of guitars that are that good'," he explains. "It is a ridiculous luxury. It is a crazy expensive item to have. But it's the only thing that does *that*, and if you want to do that then that's what you have to get.

"It's probably a combination of the wood getting older naturally, and then there's a lot going on with condensation in the tone pot. I think it increases the values of those components, so you get more treble, because, over the years, as water condenses, it can increase the value of the resistance up to, sometimes about 600k or 700k.

"But there's something there that nobody's really figured out how to replicate. Gibson made me a copy of Redeye that's extremely close. It's really, really good. But it just can't do it, you know? It's like the Klon Centaur – it's probably five per cent better than everything else, and once you hear that five per cent, you're fucked. An [EHX] Soul Food with a JHS mod sounds great, almost as good as Klon Centaur. But it's not quite as good, is it? And if you're like me, you start obsessing over it. 'Dammit, I wonder what I could do if I had that extra five horsepower?'

"There are things that you can't replicate. The Redeye is extremely even, there aren't any dead spots but there are still some places around the 14th and 15th fret where you get these overtones. I've looked at every aspect of the set-up and I know that nothing is being accidentally vibrated by the string. It's not the pickup covers. It's not a hot fret. It's not the bridge. But there's something happening that's causing another note in addition to the one that I'm playing. I've got no explanation for it. Yesterday, I was playing a note up really high, went about my business and I could still hear that note – and I had muted the strings so there's no way that should still be ringing out. These little magical things happen that I haven't heard on other guitars, even on great guitars."

TELEGRAPHED ROAD

In case you hadn't gathered from all that, Isbell is a man that truly, deeply loves the guitar. We ask him if his pandemic-enforced time at home has given him the opportunity to just play for fun a bit more. His response? "I'm always just playing for fun."

"HOW IS MARK KNOPFLER PLAYING GUITAR IN THE STYLE OF CHET ATKINS ON MTV?! HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THAT COULD EVER HAPPEN"

It's an obsession that got its hooks in him early. Isbell's history with the instrument stretches back to his days growing up in rural northern Alabama, and is a story bound up in family.

"My grandad played," he says. "He was a Pentecostal preacher and played in church, and then at home with the family. My uncle, my dad's brother, also played. Both of them started teaching when I was probably six or seven years old, and I would play rhythm guitar with my grandad while he played fiddle, banjo or mandolin.

"I was in love with it from the start, I don't know exactly why it spoke to me the way it did but I don't remember ever having to force myself to play the guitar. It's just always been the thing that I did when I didn't have to do anything else. I never wanted to be a firefighter or an astronaut or anything like that. I just always wanted to play music. Who wouldn't, you know?"

But despite growing up a short drive from Muscle Shoals and surrounded by the rich musical culture of the Southern United States, it was a guitar player from the north of England who became one of the biggest influences on Jason's playing: Mark Knopfler.

"All those Dire Straits songs were huge on the radio when I was a kid in the 1980s," he recalls. "That was something that really appealed to me because it was mainstream. How is this guy playing guitar in the style of Chet Atkins and it's on MTV?! How is that possible? It doesn't seem like that could ever happen. So I was really drawn to that, from my earliest days as a guitar player, because it was something that was rooted in a traditional type of playing but was able to find real mainstream success. I don't think anybody else has pulled off anything even close to what Mark Knopfler did. There were a lot of great guitar players in those days but none of their playing sounded like Chet Atkins!

"To play that way you have to have nerves of steel. Any decent guitar player can play through a really loud Marshall with a Les Paul and make something cool. But to play a Strat through a Vibrolux, clean, in the out-of-phase position and with your fingers? At the fuckin' US Festival or something?! That's insane. That's like astronaut-level. There is nowhere to hide. It's amazing. You have to be very confident in where you're about to put your hands."

FOND REUNIONS

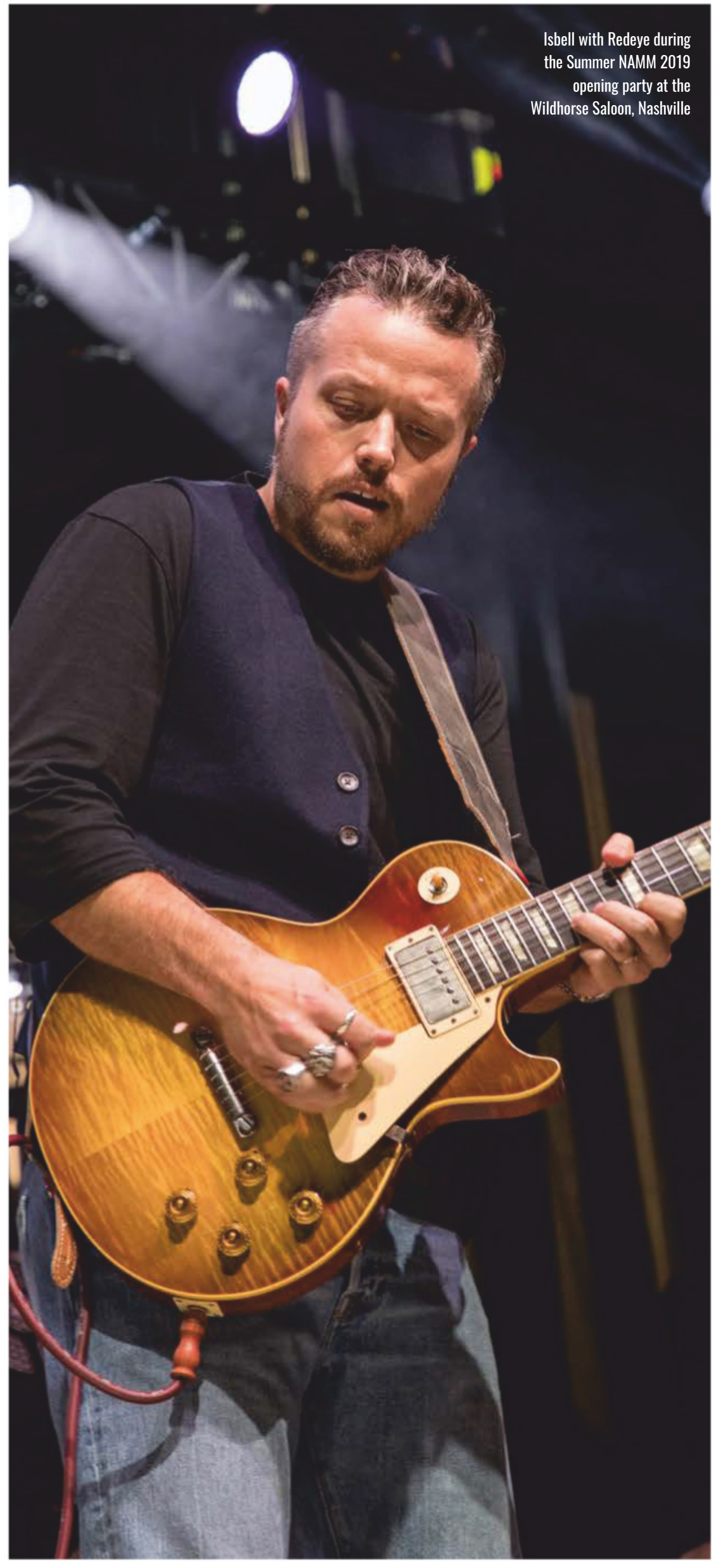
Given Isbell's ebulliently professed love of Knopfler and David Gilmour, it's appropriate that, despite the ever-distracting charms of Redeye and his almost equally beloved '53 Goldtop, *Reunions* relies heavily on his 1960 Strat for many of the album's key tones.

"This was definitely a Strat record," Isbell observes. "Y'know, we used both the Les Pauls and all kinds of stuff but the Strat was what we ended up going back to more than anything else. We did something really cool with that guitar on *Running With Our Eyes Closed* and *River*, as well as the solo on *Only Children* – we split the signal between my '64 Vibroverb, which is a 1x15, and a 120-watt Roland Jazz Chorus. We got this really clean, midrange-like, sparkly Strat tone in the out-of-phase position that is just super high-fidelity. That's what Dave was aiming for on this record, and I think we got it with that combination. We used that tone a *lot*."

Isbell's relationship with Cobb dates back to *Southeastern*, the moment everything changed for him as an artist. Cobb's career has followed a similarly steep curve that has seen him become the most in-demand producer in Nashville but the friendship and mutual understanding that the pair developed back in 2013 remains a key part of their combined creative process today.

"Dave has really great instincts, more so than anybody else I've ever worked with," says Isbell. "He can hear a song for the first time and just know what needs to be done to it. On top of that, he's easy to be around. He's there every day, which puts him way ahead of most of the big names. Most of the guys you hear described as 'famous producers' don't even fucking show up. They go play golf or something while the band is in there working. Dave is not that way at all. He comes in and he doesn't sit behind the glass. He gets in the room with you while you're tracking. The engineers are pushing buttons on the desk and Dave is out on the floor playing the shaker or an acoustic guitar or something. It fits the way we work well because it strips away the regimented condescension of making an album with a producer."

Given his penchant for Bursts and Klon Centaurs, its no surprise that very little of Isbell's rig could be described as factory-fresh. One notable exception, however, is a pair of Magnatones he combines with his '68 Bassman and '54 Vibroverb to offer "pretty much everything I want a guitar amp tone to do".



Isbell with Redeye during the Summer NAMM 2019 opening party at the Wildhorse Saloon, Nashville

© Danielle Del Valle / Getty Images

“PLAYING GUITAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE THING THAT I DID WHEN I DIDN’T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING ELSE. I NEVER WANTED TO BE A FIREFIGHTER OR AN ASTRONAUT OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I JUST WANTED TO PLAY MUSIC.

WHO WOULDN’T, YOU KNOW?”

© Jonathan Roncolato/Carter Vintage Guitars

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ABOVE Isbell with his ES-335 during the 2019 Celebrate Brooklyn Festival in New York

FACING PAGE Isbell surrounded by Ed King's guitars and a host of other treasures at Carter Vintage in Nashville, including the *Sweet Home Alabama* Strat

For acoustics on *Reunions*, however, Isbell turned away from his much-loved Martin D-18 signature models and instead opted for another recent acquisition, which yielded a sound somewhat new to the typical Isbell palette.

"I wound up using a 1946 J-45 for most of the acoustic tracks," says Isbell. "I got it about a month before we started recording. It was something a little different for me. It's still a big full-bodied acoustic guitar but it sounds different to what we'd done in the past. It's the one year where they had the script logo but they'd stopped using the banner on the headstock, so it's pretty much just like a banner J-45 but not quite as expensive."

So far, so vintage. But when it came to Isbell's choice of effects, he relied on a mix of the classic and the bleeding-edge, with his trusty Analog Man Sun Lion spearheading the former category.

"I have the first one that he made," he exclaims. "I didn't realise at first, as it was a gift from Marc Ford many years ago, when we were touring with The Black Crowes. Marc was like, 'Here, take this and if you like it, you can keep it.' Then, years later, I sent it back to Mike [Piera] for some repairs and he was like, 'Oh, hey, this is the first one of these I made', and I thought, 'Holy shit – I bet Marc didn't know that'.

"I also used a lot of Chase Bliss stuff on *Reunions*," Isbell adds. "They're weird but once you take the time to understand how to operate them, they're just amazing pedals. Those guys are geniuses and they're making stuff that no-one else has done. They've got an EQ pedal now that has flying faders [the Preamp Mk II]. It's really cool. One of those pedals is like a laptop for me – I know I'm only using it for about seven per cent of its total capabilities but it's a good seven per cent."

BACK YOURSELF

In February, Isbell celebrated eight years of sobriety. Following his departure from the Drive-By Truckers in 2007, he spent five years trying to get his solo career to take off while his drinking and substance issues worsened. Then, in 2012, an intervention held by wife Shires, his manager Traci Thomas and Ryan Adams led to Isbell checking himself into a Nashville rehab facility at 33. He emerged two weeks later with his life on a very different path. A year later came *Southeastern*, the record that finally saw Isbell realise his potential, and on which he sang, "I sobered up and I swore off that stuff, forever this time," on opening track *Cover Me Up*.

But the world of the guitar and particularly live music is so heavily entwined with alcohol that, as our chat draws to a close, we wonder if he was ever concerned about the cliché of getting clean somehow robbing musicians of their musical mojo.

"I thought that was a thing but, really, I just wanted to keep drinking," he says. "It's tricky that way because it makes you think that you're in danger of losing some kind of creativity or an ability to play or perform but none of those things are a real threat. I think I knew that but I just wanted to keep drinking, so I thought, 'Well here's another excuse for me not to quit'.

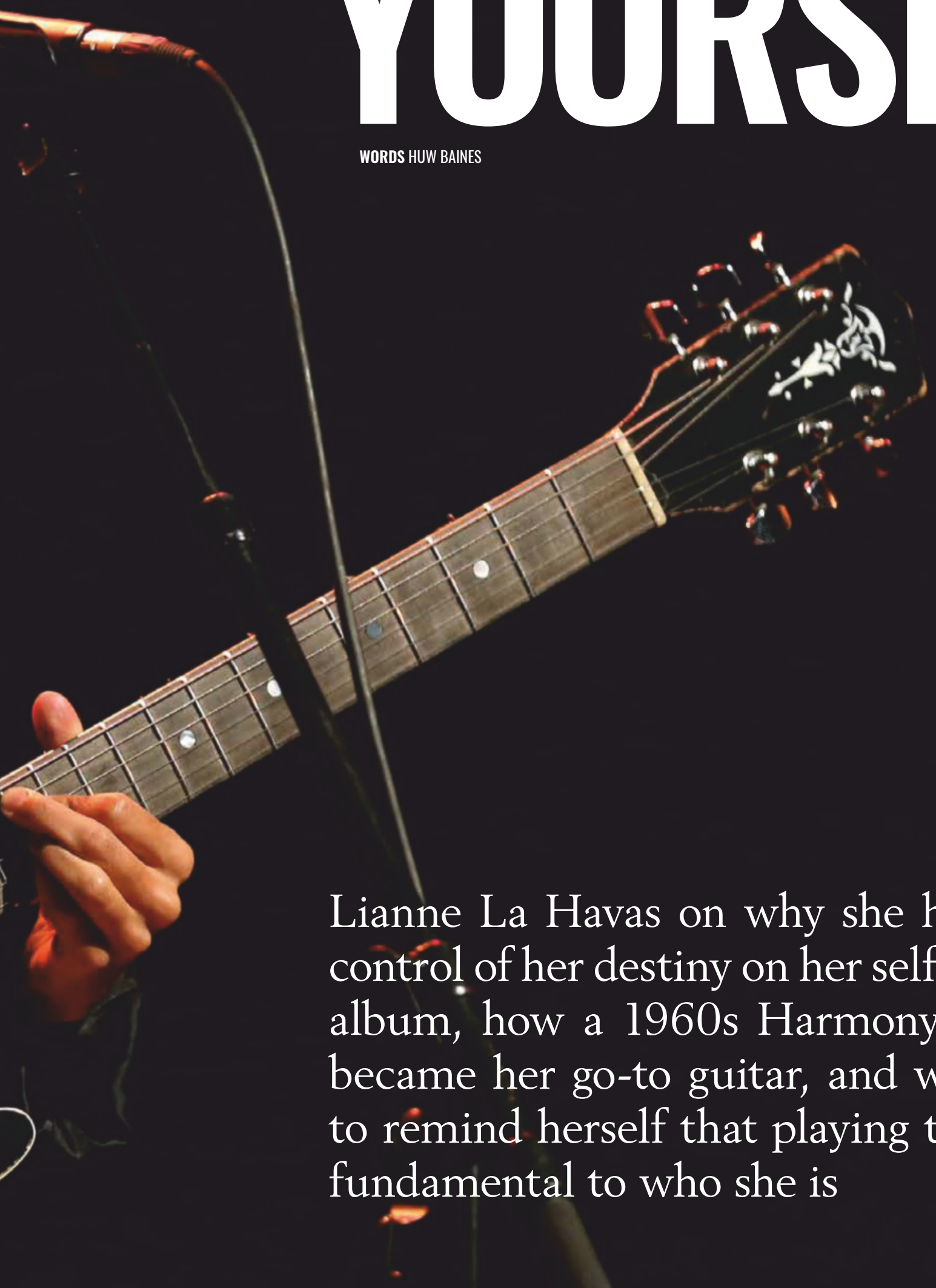
"Obviously, people think, 'I'll have a couple of drinks before the show and it'll calm my nerves' but you can just warm up. You can sit backstage and play guitar for 20 minutes and it has the same effect: your hands stop not listening to you. Everything I was able to do before, I can do a whole lot better now. It was something I worried about before I got sober but, once I saw behind the curtain I was like, 'Oh yeah, I was bullshitting myself, of course!'" G

Reunions is out now on Southeastern Records

© Frédéric Ragot / Getty Images

FINDING YOURSELF

WORDS HUW BAINES



Lianne La Havas on why she had to seize control of her destiny on her self-titled third album, how a 1960s Harmony Stratotone became her go-to guitar, and why she had to remind herself that playing the guitar is fundamental to who she is

Very few film-makers are granted final cut, and with it the chance to present their unfiltered creative vision to an audience. In truth, as commercial considerations and competing tastes tighten their respective grips, most art lives and dies in the hands of others. The music world is no different. But, on her new record, Lianne La Havas has wrangled something close to that ideal. Here, any triumphs or failures will be hers alone. "I needed to make something that was really mine this time," she says.

La Havas decided that her third LP would be self-titled immediately following the release of her second album *Blood*, back in 2015. After breaking through with *Is Your Love Big Enough?* three years earlier, her name quickly gathered recognition. Album two was supposed to confirm her arrival in the major leagues but, while it achieved positive reviews and had a solid chart performance, she felt deflated by production compromises and having to perform songs that she didn't write, including single *What You Don't Do*, a surefire hit on paper that ended up going nowhere.

"It's not that I have negative relationships with the other albums," says La Havas. "I love them but I don't know if I like that feeling of being complimented for something I don't stand behind 100 per cent. I needed the rest of my career to be about decisions that I'm proud of. I want people to see how I've progressed. There has always been a lot of people helping me, advising me, and I appreciate that. But it got to the point where I knew what I wanted and I knew that I could do it on my own, working with who I wanted to work with."

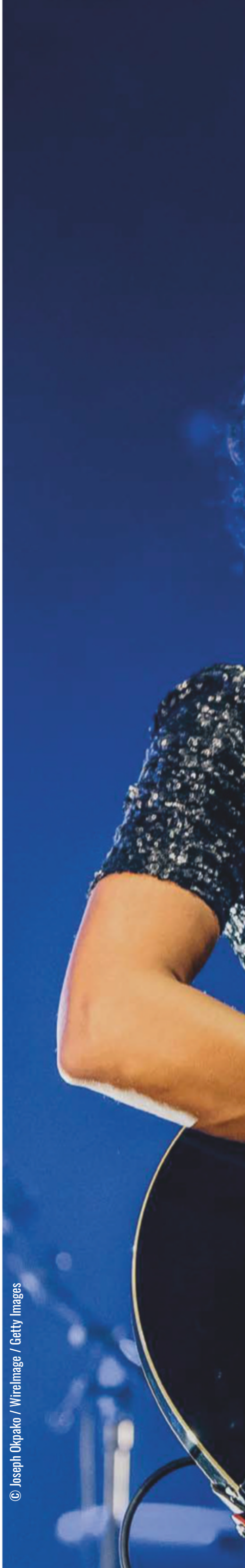
TAKING CONTROL

As a result, *Lianne La Havas* was self-produced and assembled alongside collaborators with whom the London musician had forged a bond, from her regular bandmates to composers and producers that include Matt Hales, Beni Giles, Sam Crowe and Mura Masa. "Basically, the only opinions I would take were those of the people that I trust the most," says La Havas. "It was wonderful to have them understand what I was trying to achieve, and then to see it come to life with everybody feeling as invested as I did. There are lots of decisions when you do it yourself. It's a big upheaval – it took over my life for the past three or four years. But that's what I do."

Perhaps appropriately, the end result is a record that seems to re-centre its writer, leaning heavily on the give and take between voice and guitar in a manner that *Blood* studiously avoided. The lead single *Paper Thin* unfolds over honeyed and slightly off-kilter chords that unmistakably belong to La Havas and land somewhere between The Velvet Underground and D'Angelo.

La Havas playing a lawsuit-era Ibanez archtop in 2017

© Suhaimi Abdullah/Singapore GP via Getty Images



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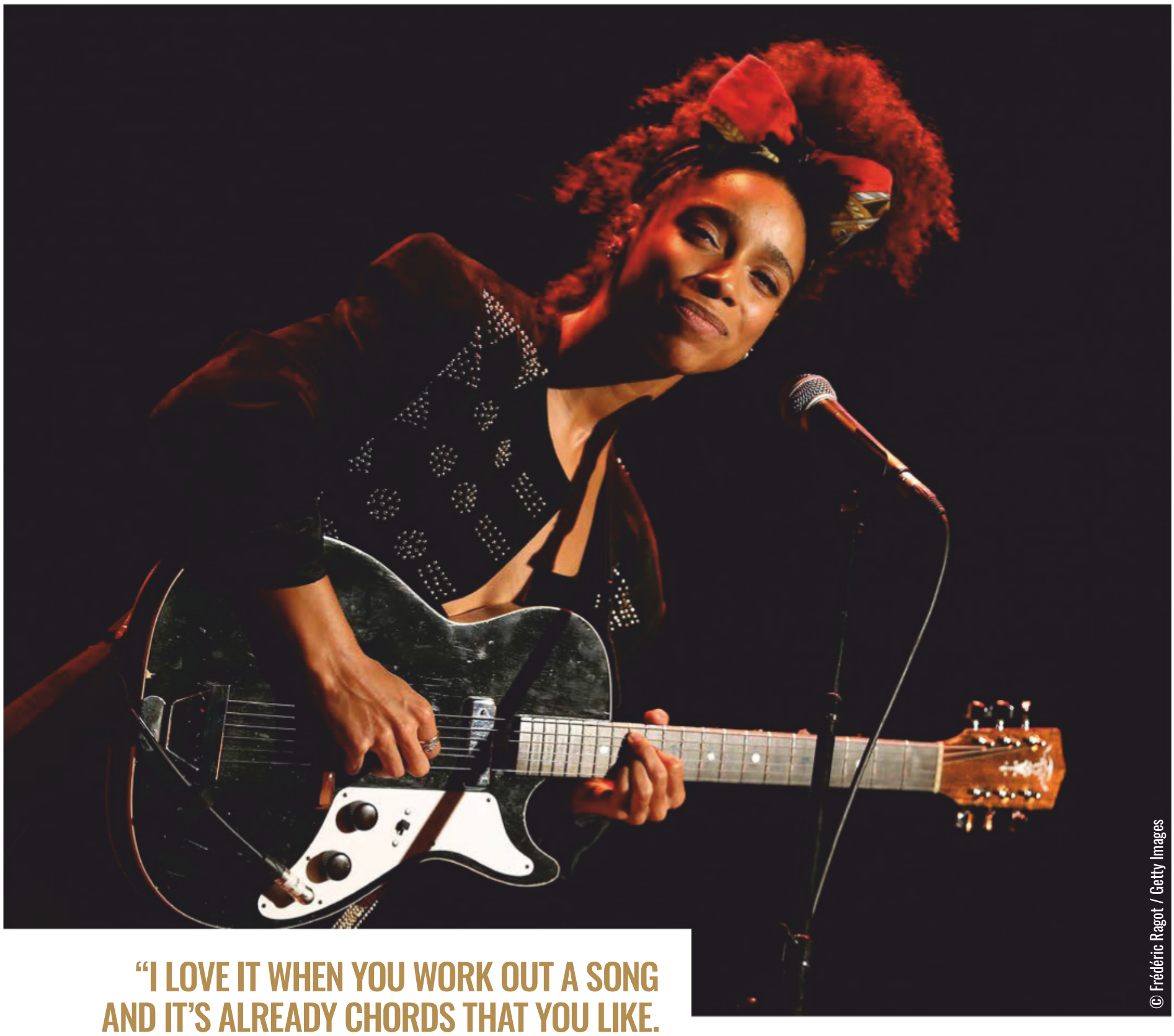
Gibson
TRINI
LOPEZ



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“I LOVE IT WHEN YOU WORK OUT A SONG AND IT’S ALREADY CHORDS THAT YOU LIKE. I FELT LIKE IT HELPED ME DEFINE MY SOUND AND MUSICAL IDENTITY”

ABOVE La Havas performing with her trusty ’64 Harmony Stratotone – a guitar that she felt “immediately familiar” with as soon as she bought it

“That was in the back of my mind,” she says. “I was like, ‘I would love for you to hear that I play guitar’. There was a conversation at the beginning of the second album campaign where, for some reason, I didn’t want to play guitar for a bit. I was like, ‘I want to dance, I want someone else to learn my parts.’ And, of course, it felt completely wrong.

“I had spent all of that time making up guitar parts, learning them, and playing them, to the point where I was like, ‘Hang on a minute, this is who I am’. The idea was to further establish how I feel about making songs with a guitar – that it doesn’t have to be strummed open chords, it can be music. It can be a piece on its own, and whatever you sing is complementary. That’s how I feel about what I make.”

GOLD STANDARD

As glossy as the production choices on *Blood* were, the song *Green & Gold* provided the impetus for La Havas’s style to properly take flight on its follow-up. The song’s latticework of guitars would find a welcoming home on *Lianne La Havas* – but its uber-sleek rendering would not. Here, she has chosen instead to foreground the bare-bones nature of her writing on highlights such as *Green Papaya*, a stark and beautiful cut that sings thanks to dexterous playing and subtle, considered vocal harmonies.

“As much as I love *Blood*, it’s sort of unclear that I’m a guitarist on that album,” she says. “I tried to add drums to *Green Papaya* but they detracted from the song. I wanted you to be able to hear everything I felt and heard that first day that I made that song with Sam [Crowe]. It was really such a revelation, because I had to learn a new guitar part in order to make that song exist, to even come up with the melody. We tried to remove the buzzing of the guitar using some plug-in, and we tried to redo the vocals, but that made it so it wasn’t what it was, which made me feel good. I just had to go back to what it was.”

Sitting at the heart of the record is a cover of Radiohead’s *Weird Fishes* that speaks to La Havas’s aims. The expressive half-speed version of the song, from 2007’s *In Rainbows*, has been part of her live repertoire for years, and was tracked following an ebullient performance at Glastonbury in 2019.

© Joseph Okpako / WireImage / Getty Images

“I HAD SPENT ALL OF THAT TIME MAKING UP GUITAR PARTS, LEARNING THEM, AND PLAYING THEM, TO THE POINT WHERE I WAS LIKE, ‘HANG ON A MINUTE, THIS IS WHO I AM.’”

ABOVE La Havas playing the Royal Albert Hall in 2016

At first glance, you could comfortably mistake the track for a La Havas original – she inhabits its rolling gait and sparks a stunning wig-out at its denouement – but, over time, it becomes a conversation with Radiohead’s original because it exists on its own terms to such an extent.

“It’s the kind of song I wish I’d written,” she says. “When I was working it out the first time, I remember thinking, ‘This is just like what I’d want to play’. It had really beautiful, emotive chords with shapes that I was familiar with. I love it when you work out a song and it’s already chords that you like. I felt like it helped me define my sound and musical identity. We were able to get a distortion pedal in there and have a deeply groovy drum beat, and that late-night bass. It’s a very sexy, sensual version. Its lyrics really resonated with me and what I was going through. It felt perfect for the middle of the album, and perfect for signifying to me how the rest of the album should be recorded.”

CAPTURING THE RUSH

Love and sex are focal points for the record, which loosely tracks the rise and fall of a relationship across its 10 songs. Beyond the lyric sheet though, La Havas sought to capture the rush of infatuation, lingering uncertainty and total vulnerability through music. Unusually for a concept piece, it seeks to make an emotional connection before an intellectual one.

“I was writing a lot of the music before the words came,” she says. “I realised that for me to make music without words is also an expression of that feeling. I was excited to learn that I could emote without saying anything. I used the music to help me figure out what to say. I thought, ‘What does this sound like?’ and it ended up matching the mood created via the music.”

La Havas has spent the past five years figuring out how to transpose her experiences into statements such as these. As much as *Lianne La Havas* pulls the listener in multiple directions, it’s not a record of transient emotion. Having lost her grandmother and great-grandmother, and navigated a break-up, extended periods of travel between the UK and US helped crystallise how she felt about herself and her work, much as her time in Jamaica, her mother’s home country, did prior to the release of *Blood*.

"I've realised that's the way I am. I need time to understand things to get me to the next chapter," she says. "When you leave your home for a bit, you start to understand yourself in a different way. You're used to yourself in that context, because you've always been there. When you go elsewhere, you take yourself out of your own context. I find it very inspiring."

NYLON FASHION

La Havas grew up in south London, living with her grandparents following her parents' split. With her mother close by, working punishing hours as a postwoman, her grandparents were asked to babysit and, as La Havas put it in one interview, "I sort of never left." Her father, a keen amateur musician, also remained in her life and rustled up her first guitar when she was in her late teens. "It was a steel-string nylon," she says, with a laugh. "It was meant to be nylon but they messed it up. It's a shit guitar but it was my first, so I still have it and I love it. It was an eBay thing. It cost about £30. My dad didn't want to pay postage so we drove to Stevenage to pick it up."

La Havas was initially driven to play by the women around her, including former bandmate Charlene Soraia, before turning to influences from further afield. "I couldn't believe my eyes when Charlene played," she remembers. "Her hands looked so natural, like they were meant to be doing that. I was inspired by her, as well as Lauryn Hill's *MTV Unplugged* album. I already loved *The Miseducation*… and the Fugees, so finding out that she played guitar was mind-blowing. Then I discovered my all-time favourite: Emily Remler. I am obsessed with her. I am so glad that she walked the earth. She was a jazz guitarist but composed her own music, and accompanied legendary musicians and singers. I found her instructional tutorials on YouTube."

Another key influence in La Havas's story is Prince, who championed her music from the very beginning, and once held a press conference at her home amid the heady days of his 2014 Hit and Run tour. His death in 2016 continues to weigh heavily on her, particularly following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, and the ensuing Black Lives Matter protests. "I don't know if I have accepted it yet," she says. "It took a really long time for it to feel real. What I take comfort from is the time that we did have together.

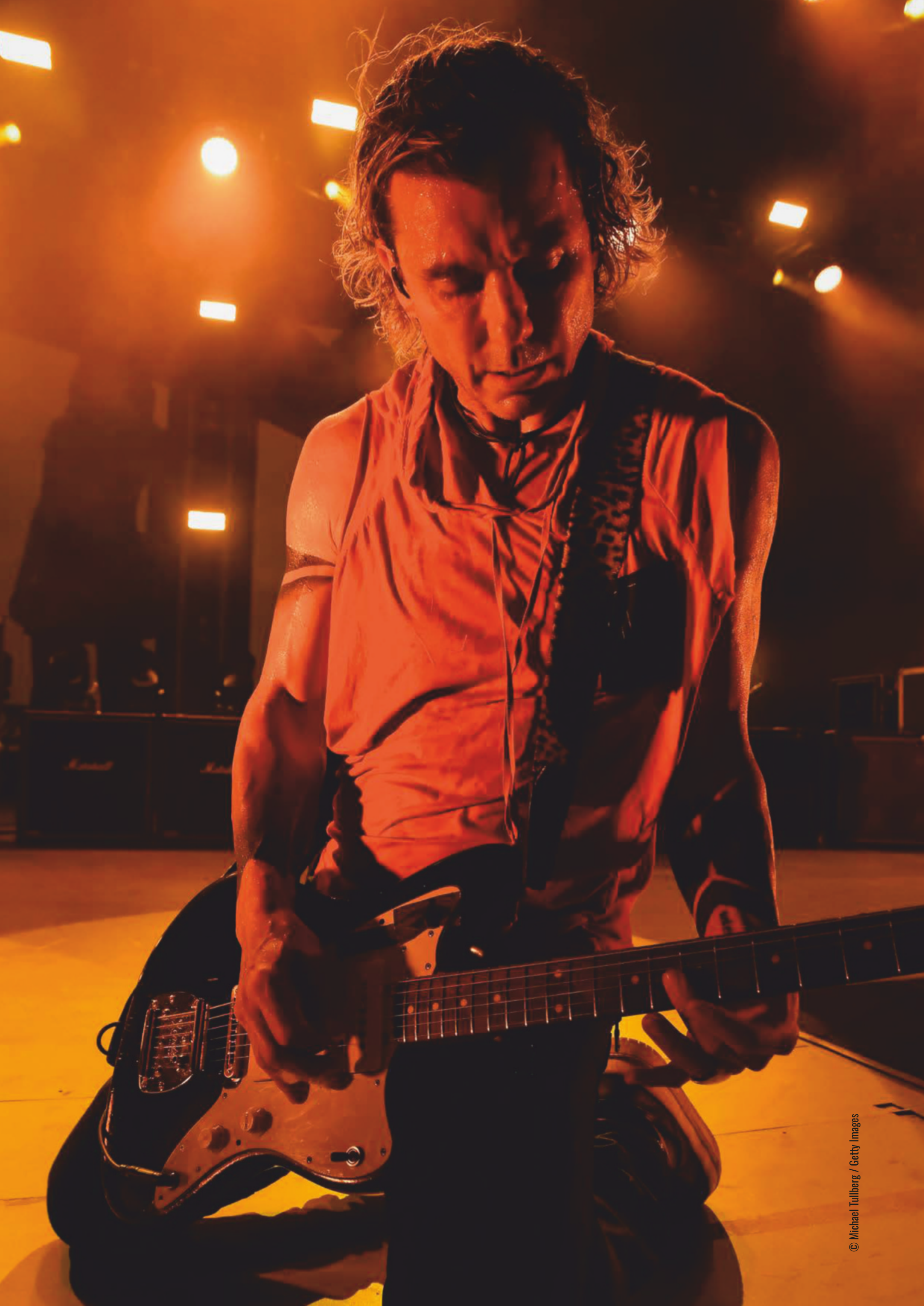
"It was surreal, like a dream: 'Prince is coming to London tonight. Can you be here at this time?' It'd be two in the morning and he'd be in a private members' club waiting with drinks and snacks. It was so mysterious how he made his way, stealthily, around the planet. I really miss him. I really miss his work. I miss his voice. I wonder what he might say about what was going on in Minneapolis. I'm sure he'd have something profound, and beautiful, and useful to say. And he'd probably be doing something."

PERFECT HARMONY

Despite La Havas fraternising with a Stratocaster on her latest record, its backbone remains her 1964 Harmony Stratotone, and a fondness for nylon-string acoustics that foreground the ornate textures of her fingerpicking. "I was immediately familiar with it when I bought it," she says of the Stratotone. "It felt like it had been mine for a really long time, and I didn't know that an instrument could feel like that. I like that it's almost harp-like when you go up the neck, and also kind of piano-like. The tone has a real roundness to it. Nylon is the natural progression for me from my electric. You can make it whatever you want it to be."

Releasing self-titled records at opportune moments has become a common move but La Havas embodies the idea of a reset more than most. Her third album is her most considered and honest to date, arriving adorned with gossamer leads and indelible melodies that provide a direct channel to her inner workings and the way she thinks as a musician. "It's like a synchronised dance between the hands and the voice," she says.

Lianne La Havas is out now on Nonesuch/Warner Bros



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HEAVY HITTER

WORDS HUW BAINES

Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale on getting into the Octagon, how he's always the one bringing the chaos, and why new album *The Kingdom* sees the band still asking questions after almost 30 years together

Nostalgia is sticky, sweet and immensely satisfying – for a moment or two. It's also quicksand, a slow death for artists who give up trying to reinvent themselves and instead settle for the fading light of former glories. The lure is there for Gavin Rossdale, who can look back across three decades of music and pick out platinum certifications, but the Bush frontman isn't ready to give in yet.

The band's new record is called *The Kingdom* and, while it doesn't reinvent the wheel, it does ask some fresh questions. Chief among them is this: what if Bush were a metal band? Having spent years as the light relief among heavier acts on festival bills, here Rossdale leans into his love of acts such as Tool, System of a Down and Deftones in an attempt to prove that Bush can hang with these bands on wax as well as on stage.

Picking up the phone from his home in Los Angeles, Rossdale delights in the noisy, riff-heavy mess he's made. "To play acoustic guitar and front a band is my idea of slow torture," he says, with a laugh. The touchstones he lays out for his approach to the new record range from the confrontational to the esoteric, from shoegaze legends My Bloody Valentine's eardrum-splitting wall of noise to the Glenn Branca-fronted avant-garde guitar orchestra that helped launch Sonic Youth.

"What I get turned on by at the moment, especially after all this live work, is seeing the power of cyclical things," he adds. "I grew up loving The Beatles and Neil Young, as well as the beginning of the punk movement, and it's an interesting challenge for me to try to find melody when you're using heavier riffs and heavier cycles. It's about finding a way through – often you're on one chord, so you've got to work to find the melody. But somehow you manage to unlock things."

GETTING YOUR HOOKS IN

The new album, though, doesn't always sound like the sum of its influences. Rossdale has taken his share of critical licks over the years but he's a savvy and self-deprecating songwriter who has enjoyed much success in the realm of commercial rock. Duly, he hasn't set aside the tools with which he made his name. From the soaring chorus of album opener *Flowers On A Grave* onwards, it's clear that the Bush blueprints are still important. "Even though it's heavy, it's not heavy metal," he says. "You have to have your own sound."

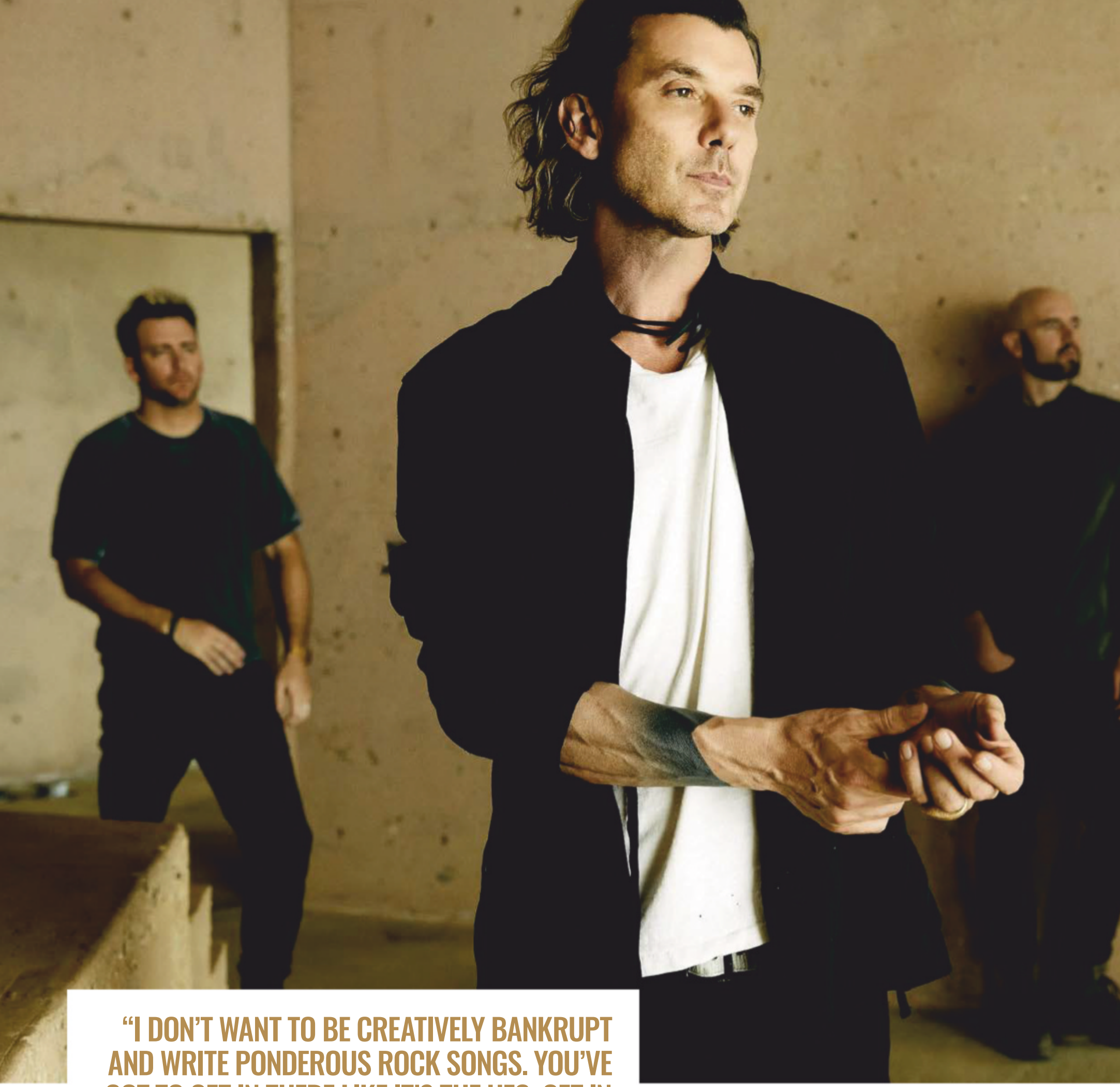
Here, that sound is polished and uncluttered. The riffs, delivered in tandem with lead guitarist Chris Traynor, are given the space in which to work, with Bush setting aside the buzzsaw noise of their Steve Albini collaboration *Razorblade Suitcase* and the electronics of *The Science Of Things* in favour of monolithic distortion and a well-drilled rhythm section. "You try to be as sonically pleasing as possible," says Rossdale.

"Chris and Corey [Britz, bass] are incredibly clean and precise players. I've always brought a bit of chaos to it, especially live, with the way I play. I'm really rhythmic but I'm more like regular earthly people. That provides a nice balance. I'll always play to the drummer, Chris will always play to the click, and we've agreed to disagree for 20 years. But when you put me and him next to each other, and when you split it up the way that we do on the rhythm tracks, it just works. My playing goes intrinsically with how I sing, and his playing is amazing architecture."

BACK TO THE SOURCE

Bush might be entering new territory on new record *The Kingdom* but the nuts and bolts of Rossdale's writing, and his desire to scatter breadcrumbs to remind us of his English heritage, remain firm.

FACING PAGE Gavin Rossdale knee-deep in riffs at LA's Greek Theatre, 2019



“I DON’T WANT TO BE CREATIVELY BANKRUPT AND WRITE PONDEROUS ROCK SONGS. YOU’VE GOT TO GET IN THERE LIKE IT’S THE UFC: GET IN THE OCTAGON AND TAKE ON A FEW BIG ONES”

FACING PAGE
Rossdale was mainly seen onstage with a Strat for many years but has Jazzmasters have become more of a feature of late

Riff-wise, he’s a fan of picking up a bass first before fleshing things out. “It just feels more London, more dangerous, more dancehall, even though you’re in a completely rock environment,” he says. “You put all these weird memories and influences together and that’s what you get. I love Massive Attack more than I love Slayer. I can’t help it. There’s always that push and pull of trying to get some of my roots in there.”

Everything starts with words on paper. Rossdale needs his lyrics to light a fire under the rest of his songwriting process, and underpinning the noise here are screeds that see him trying to tap into the anger and disillusionment of the age without mounting a soapbox. “Political music is hard anyway,” he says. “Very few bands can do it with any tunefulness. God bless Billy Bragg. I don’t want to be didactic, like, ‘Gather round, people, and let me tell you a story’. I just can’t do that. I’m not good enough.

“My lyrics give me direction, they give me a reason,” he adds. “I write in blocks. At the beginning of a session, if I’ve got six fertile lyric pages in front of me, I know that I’m good for about seven songs. Come the ninth song, when I’m going into work and just churning out riffs and sitting there all day, I lose direction. I did some co-writes on this record as well, so there are other times when I get someone to write a riff for me just to change it up.”

Alongside his work with guitarist Traynor, Rossdale enjoyed a fruitful collaborative period with composer Tyler Bates after connecting to work on the album track *Bullet Holes*, which featured on the soundtrack to Keanu Reeves punch festival *John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum*. “I’d done a bunch of writing on my own as usual and I was like, ‘Why?’,” he says.

© Scott Legato / Getty Images

"I'm surrounded by really good people, so let's see if someone wants to throw me a riff, throw me some music. Nothing matters except making it great.

"I had a great time with Tyler. I was like, 'Wow, it takes half my job away if I'm not the only one doing music'. It was quick and inspiring. Chris and Tyler are better players than me, so they might give me a riff that I'm not good enough to play. It works the other way around too – if I have a chord sequence you could fit a riff into, someone will put the riff on afterwards."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Rossdale immerses himself in the writing process. He composed much of *The Kingdom* between stints on the road, sequestering himself in his studio and experimenting, falling back on well-worn gear as well as interjections from his Axe-Fx rig. "I have a Kramer Travis Bean[-style], with a punchy sound," he says.

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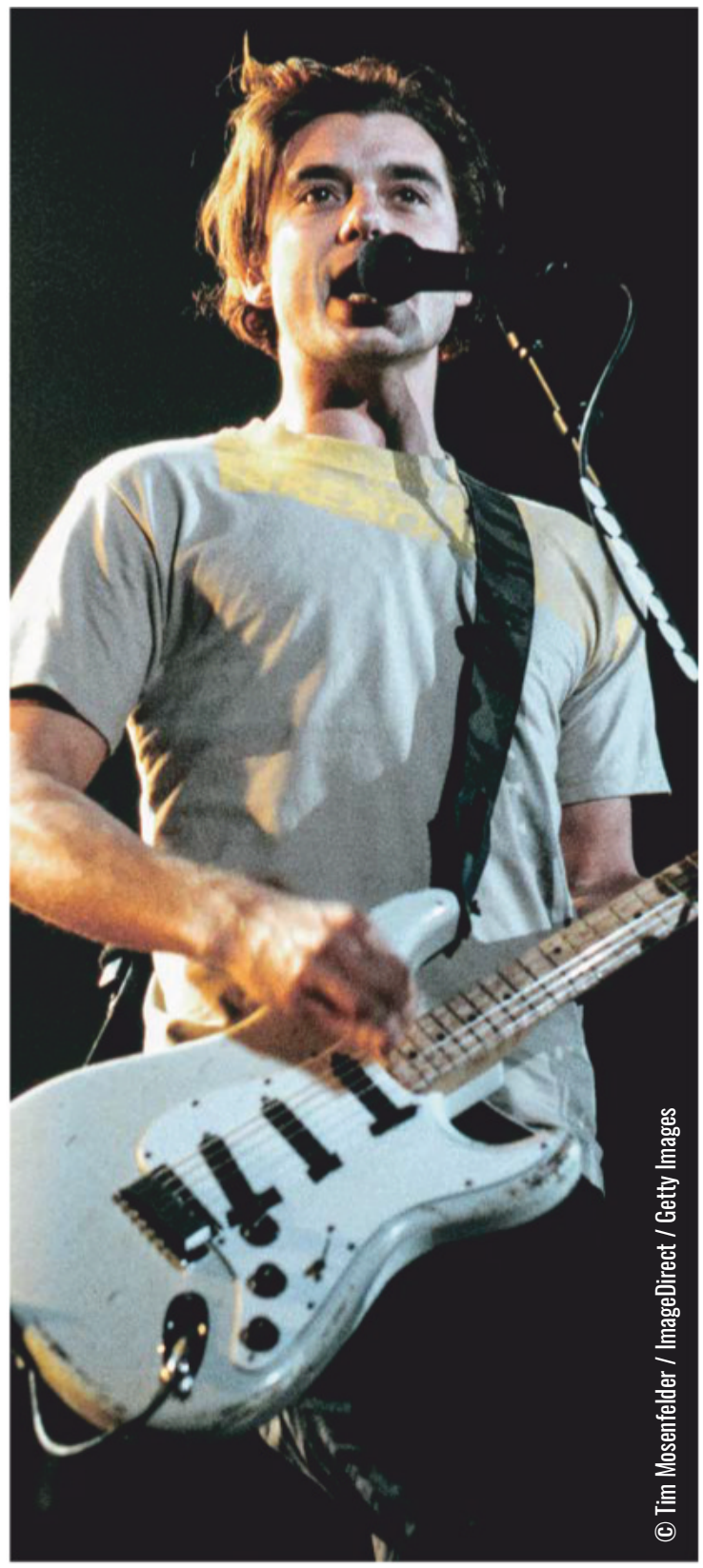

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"IF YOU CAN'T MAKE A RECORD THAT STANDS ON ITS OWN MERITS, DON'T PUT IT OUT"

ABOVE Bush's other guitarist, Chris Traynor, on stage with Rossdale in 2019

ABOVE RIGHT A Strat-toting Rossdale back in Bush's post-*Razorblade Suitcase* pomp in 1999

"I have a custom Strat with some humbuckers that Fender made me, and I have a few amps set up – an old Hiwatt, a Diezel, a Silver Jubilee, a Fender Bassman – with a thousand pedals.

"Once you hit a good rhythm sound, that's your sound. In the studio, I like to have everything ready. I've always got a mic, a bass, guitars, and keys on. You just get into this thing where you try to be as free as possible. The better it sounds at the start, the more inspiring it is to play."

Having recently spent time on the road with fellow alt-rock survivors Live celebrating the 25th anniversary of Bush's debut LP *Sixteen Stone*, Rossdale sees his studio interludes as vital to keeping the band alive creatively. He's happy to acknowledge past successes but doesn't want to live in the 1990s forever. As with most artists, these days Bush make the lion's share of their money by touring – but they don't see that as an excuse to phone it in.

"If I'm playing live a lot, I don't want to be morally or creatively bankrupt and write ponderous mid-tempo rock songs that won't make the set," says Rossdale. "You've got to get in there like it's the UFC: get in the Octagon and take on a few big ones.

"Our goal was for people to listen to *Flowers On A Grave* and get the record but know nothing about the catalogue," he adds. "If you can't make a record that stands on its own merits, you shouldn't be putting it out. We all wish we had the hindsight to look back and maybe do things differently, but each record is a snapshot of a particular time. With each one, I can remember what was going on in my life emotionally, physically, who was around, where I was."

The Kingdom is out now on BMG

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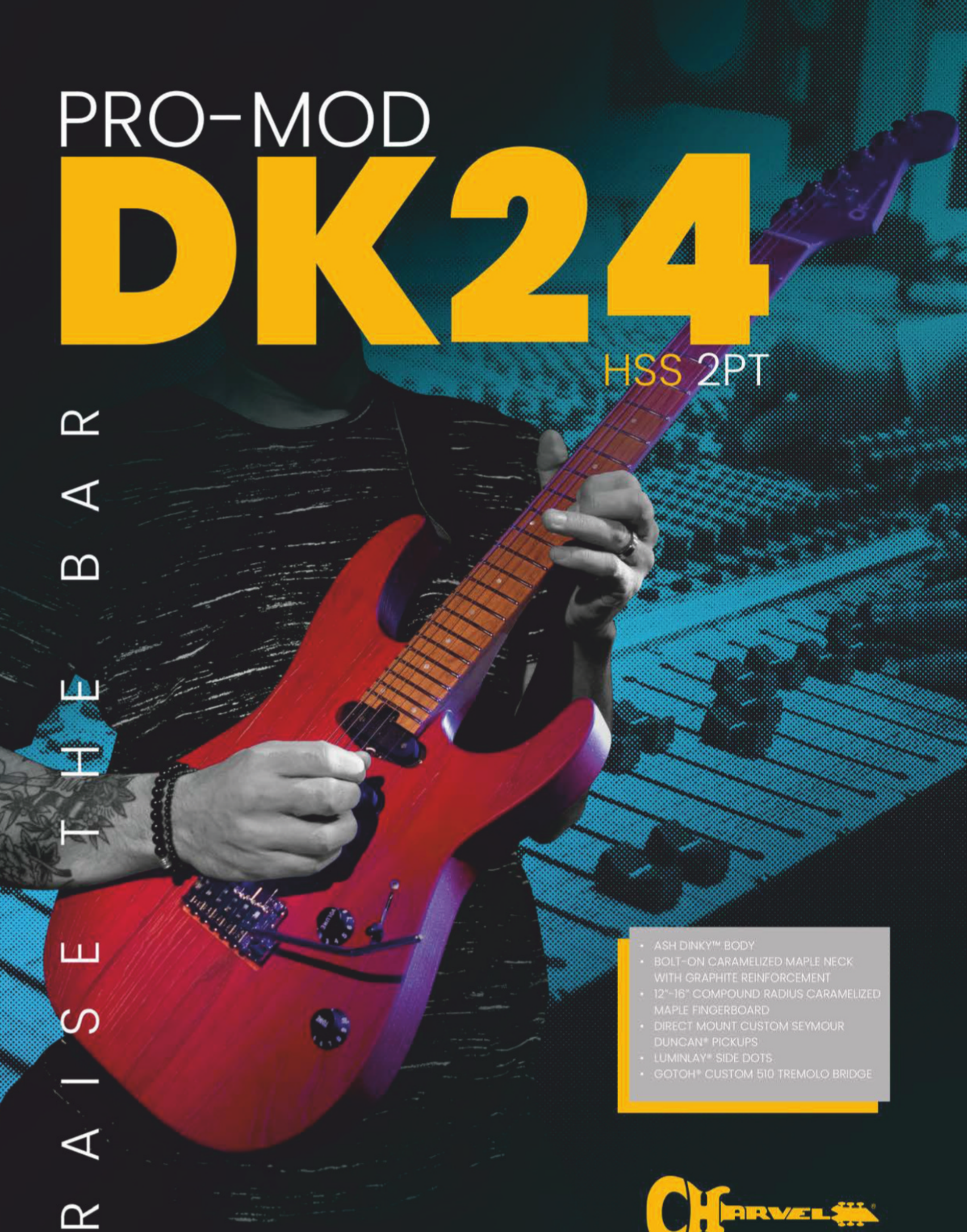

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JIMI HENDRIX'S

GREATEST GUITAR MOMENTS

— RANKED —

Jimi Hendrix is a guitar player of such iconic status that even the most non-musical cite him as a reference point for six-string greatness. What's more, for someone whose time in the spotlight effectively spanned just four years and three studio albums, there is thankfully a colossal amount of Hendrix material to consider.

His sudden passing led to a decades-long archaeological dig that disinterred every hotel-room recording, every studio take and every lost concert, almost all of which has been packaged in varying states of undress and paraded in the public domain. It's a testament to his unearthly talent that so much of it is sensational music in its own right – Jimi's lost-and-found archive is a deep well of inspiration for obsessed guitarists.

So when it comes to narrowing down that huge portfolio of material to his greatest 20 moments, where do you start, and how do you define greatness?

We haven't included many obscurities in this list, for fear of displacing better-known classics. Instead, we've attempted to pick out 20 special moments from a tragically short career that illustrate the extraordinary variety of Hendrix's playing, and that will reward you every time you return to them.

Hendrix rocking a Flying V at the Isle of Wight festival in 1970

© Doug McKenzie / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

© Ron Howard / Redferns / Getty Images

20 RED HOUSE

It may be difficult to believe but there was once a time when you could doodle your way through a 20-minute cosmic blues jam, look up, and *still see an audience*. At his live shows, Hendrix would often switch from his omnipresent Strat to a Gibson (usually a Flying V or an SG) and promptly vanish into this welcome break from the pyrotechnic thrills expected of him to pay tribute to the elemental influences at the heart of his playing.

Virtually every surviving recording of *Red House* is a string- and mind-bending odyssey through the blues lexicon, unfurling like a fresh glimpse into Hendrix's unconscious brain. The 3:50 version on the UK print of *Are You Experienced*, one of the first songs the Experience ever recorded, is just the tip of the iceberg.

PLAYING HOUSE

Noel Redding played the 'bass' part on a "terrible, awful" borrowed hollowbody guitar on the original recording and would occasionally switch to guitar for this track on early tours

19 THIRD STONE FROM THE SUN

This extraordinary slice of psychedelia has been described by Charles Shaar Murray as a "hazy cosmic jive straight out of the Sun Ra science-fiction textbook". It's often cited as evidence of Hendrix's connection to jazz thanks to its opening major ninth chords, Wes Montgomery-style octave doublestops, improvisational shifts, and Jimi's interplay with Mitch Mitchell, who was influenced by Coltrane drummer Elvin Jones.

In its final section, after flirting with the motifs of surf music, Jimi pioneers the use of the Strat's vibrato arm as a kind of instrument in itself. The squalls of feedback he coaxes into a chimeric, wailing, far-out soundscape opened up virgin territory for generations of experimental musicians.

ON THE RIGHT LINES

The song's riff was blatantly lifted by Right Said Fred's *I'm Too Sexy*, whose writer Fred Fairbrass said, "The Hendrix estate were very cool about it and just asked for a writing credit and a charitable donation"

18 ROOM FULL OF MIRRORS

Recorded in his final year and originally released on posthumous 1971 album *Rainbow Bridge* (a soundtrack album with a confusingly loose relationship to the film of the same name), *Room Full Of Mirrors* was among the strong contenders for inclusion on Jimi's follow-up to *Electric Ladyland*.

The song had been turning up in sets in various incarnations since 1968, with the *Rainbow Bridge* studio version featuring his Band of Gypsys cohorts Buddy Miles and Billy Cox. Some of Jimi's most enduring lyrics are backed up by an extraordinarily expressive, tonally diverse layering of delayed guitars, harmony lines, funky rhythm parts and virtually all of his fretboard trickery – plus a tremendous amount of cowbell.

WORK THE ROOM

In 1990, early drafts of Hendrix's lyrics for *Room Full Of Mirrors*, scrawled on the back of pink promo cards for New York club venue The Scene, sold at auction for more than $35,000

Hendrix cocking his wah pedal as the Experience perform on the BBC's *Happening For Lulu*. Minutes later they'd be dumped off air – not that they seemed to mind

17 HEY JOE/SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE

As well as blazing a trail at Woodstock and Monterey, Hendrix proved he could also create rock history in the most unusual of settings. In January 1969, the BBC invited The Jimi Hendrix Experience to play live on awkward teatime show *Happening For Lulu*, starchily stipulating that the band play *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)*, followed by oldie *Hey Joe*, with the host joining in on the latter.

Apparently not keen on the duet idea and having had a cheeky smoke backstage, the Experience were in mischievous mood. Halfway through a half-hearted *Hey Joe*, they broke off and dedicated a cover of *Sunshine Of Your Love* to the newly disbanded Cream. The producers pulled them off air.

CREAM OF THE CROP

The clip, in which Jimi refers to *Hey Joe* as "rubbish" and seems amused by the producers' efforts to shut him down, only survived erasure thanks to BBC librarian Nick Maingay happening upon it

16 THE STARS THAT PLAY WITH LAUGHING SAM'S DICE

The B-side to *Burning Of The Midnight Lamp* was an altogether different animal. Both songs together marked the first time Jimi had recorded using the wah pedal that was to become his signature effect. But that's where the similarities ended.

On the A-side, Jimi embellished his fragile, lonely lament with filtered squalls of guitar and heavenly backing vocals from The Sweet Inspirations, whereas *Laughing Sam's Dice* showcased its creator's fun side. The song clings on admirably for roughly 50 seconds as a poppy confection before embarking on a guided tour of the solar system, bolstered by unhinged bends and spontaneous, scuzzy whammy-feedback insanity.

ROLL THE DICE

Scholars have retrospectively surmised that the title of this track quietly refers to hallucinogenics. *The Stars That Play* (STP) *With Laughing Sam's Dice* (LSD)? Surely not

15 IF 6 WAS 9

This acid-blues workout, which featured on the soundtracks to both *Easy Rider* and *Point Break*, finds the Experience, producer Chas Chandler and engineer Eddie Kramer pushing against the restrictions of four-track recording to deliver Hendrix's assertion of individualism in the lyrics.

The song ventures back and forth from its brooding, sparse proto-metal verses into spoken-word blues, psychedelic jazz-jam excursions and an atmospheric whispered section punctuated by freeform drums. Jimi embellishes the looser sections with unusual angelic major-key glissandos of delayed guitar and (as you do) a freakout on a recorder he found lying around the studio, which Kramer bathed in echo. Hendrix was proud of the song. "I adore *If 6 Was 9*," he said. "It's what you call a great feeling of blues."

IRONING OUT THE KINKS

When the studio master was lost, the final version of the song was created from an earlier mix that Noel Redding had taken home. Wrinkles in the tape had to be smoothed out with a clothes iron

14 ARE YOU EXPERIENCED

The Experience's debut album could have been lauded for any one of its unique ingredients: its experimental songwriting, its ensemble playing, its Strat pyrotechnics, its pioneering effects or its daring studio invention. The serene drift of its title track though – one of Eddie Kramer's favourites – is the perfect synergy of all of these factors coming together at once. Backwards guitar had been heard before, but Hendrix took the concept to another level here, such was his unparalleled understanding of his instrument. "He knew from the downbeat precisely what the guitar was going to sound like and what the melody was going to be," said Kramer. "He was playing the melody in real time but he'd figured out how it was going to sound backwards."

EXPRESS YOURSELF

The whistling, whooping mob on the track is credited as The Milky Way Express, thought to have included Frank Zappa

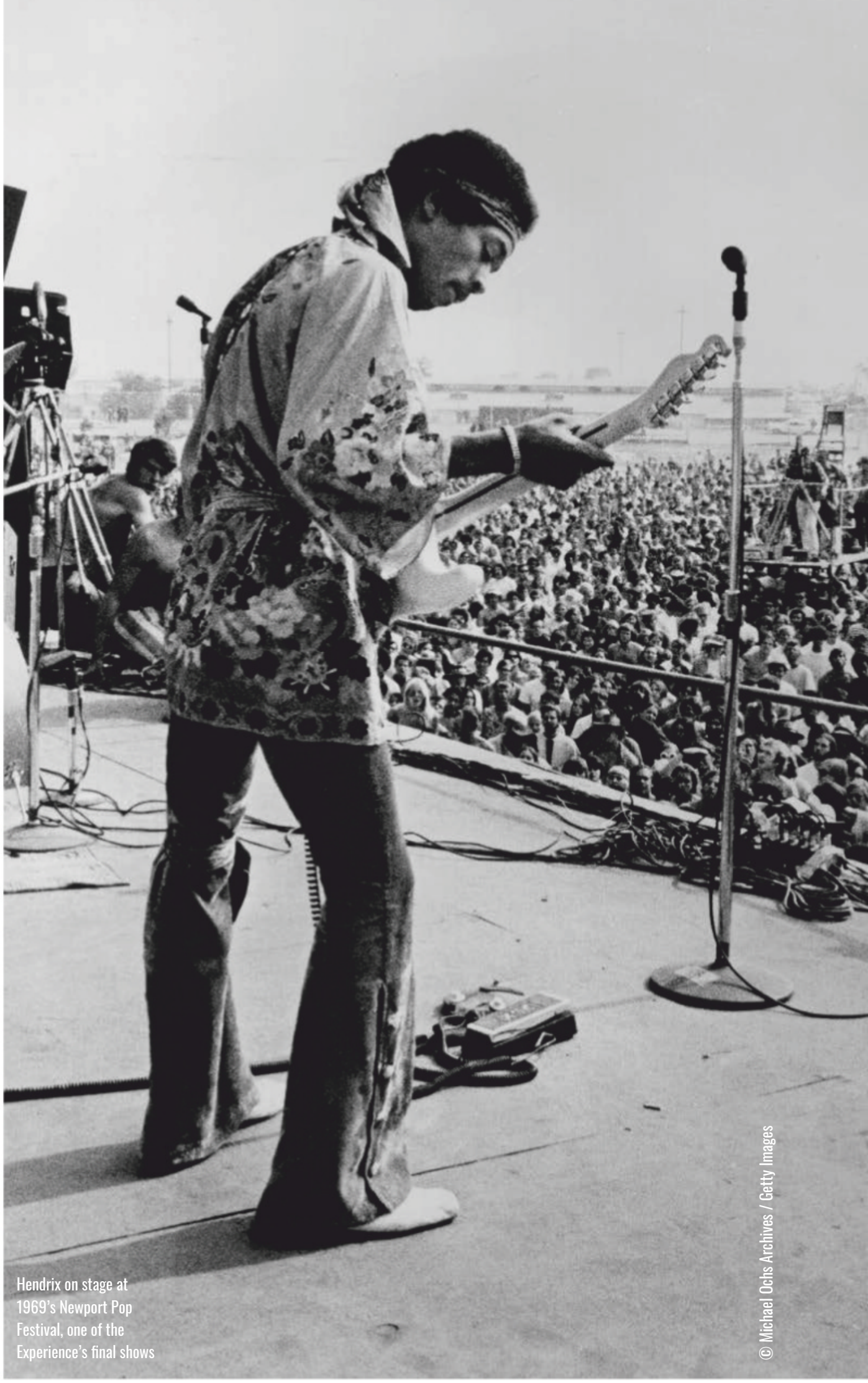
13 CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC

Placing a respectable 13 here but always a controversial contender for the top spot in lists of the all-time-greatest kazoo songs, *Crosstown Traffic* is a masterclass in building layers of guitar. Hendrix calls on everything he learnt from standing in the shadows as a sideman to pack lightning bolts of energy into its rhythm track. His strutting R&B riff is decorated with layered chord stabs, unison bends, wildly vibrato'd doublestops and strummed build-ups – all of this before the makeshift kazoo/comb even makes an appearance to harmonise with the voice and lead-guitar line.

Crosstown Traffic is a real oddity in the Hendrix canon: it's the most irrepressibly rhythmic thing he ever produced and surely the catchiest.

TRAFFIC JAM

Appropriately enough, Traffic's Dave Mason lends backing vocals to the track



Hendrix on stage at 1969's Newport Pop Festival, one of the Experience's final shows

© Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images

12 CASTLES MADE OF SAND

The poetic imagery of *Castles Made Of Sand*, packed with oblique parallels to his own life story, fascinates Hendrix scholars. But this fragile 2:47 song is also a tale of two remarkable guitar parts. The first showcases the fluid chord-melody rhythm style that Jimi honed after watching Curtis Mayfield first hand (when his band toured with The Impressions in 1963), transforming a straightforward chord progression into an emotionally charged rhythmic backdrop.

The second is the reverse guitar part, which is more exposed and off-the-cuff here than elsewhere in his catalogue (see *Are You Experienced*), and somehow more dreamlike as a result. It's all rounded off by the ending, where you hear Hendrix turn his volume control up to full and launch into the intro's sliding add9 figure that fades into ghostly reverb.

SHIFTING SANDS

The instrumental run-through featured on the *West Coast Seattle Boy* box set (called *Anthology Version*) offers further insight into Hendrix's chordal style

18+

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Jimi tuning up at The Speakeasy in his adopted home of London, 1967

11 GYPSY EYES

The early Experience recordings were by all accounts hurried and economical affairs, with recording time and tape at a premium – which makes the resulting improvisation and experimentation all the more remarkable. But by 1968, Hendrix's circumstances had changed and he was more inclined to pursue his musical vision through endless takes, which led to friction with producer Chas Chandler and bassist Noel Redding.

Gypsy Eyes is one such example – one marathon Record Plant session yielded 41 takes, none of which were used. The end version justifies the means, however, as Jimi and Mitch Mitchell were given free rein to perfect one of *Electric Ladyland*'s funky highlights, with guitars slathered in effects, including Leslie right at the end.

SAFE PAIR OF HANDS

Eddie Kramer's photo of Hendrix putting the final draft of *Gypsy Eyes* together in New York's newly opened Record Plant is evidence that, despite playing guitar left handed, Hendrix actually wrote with his right hand

10 ANGEL

Hendrix would take his time with certain compositions, and *Angel* was something he kept around throughout his career. Various demos and even hotel recordings track how it evolved into the version he recorded a couple of months before his death.

An anthemic counterpart to the kind of introspective balladry showcased on the likes of *Little Wing* and *Castles Made Of Sand*, the song's inclusion on *The Cry Of Love* (the first posthumous album of Hendrix material) and its unguarded sentimentality made it an even more poignant listen. The Doppler effect on the guitar, which comes courtesy of a Uni-Vibe, shrouds Hendrix's picking in otherworldliness. The galloping ascent of the song's ending aside, this is as close to writing a straightforward, universal ballad as Jimi ever came.

HEAVEN SENT

The song came to Jimi in a vivid dream he'd had when he was a child, which saw his mother Lucille being carried away on a camel. She died two years later. The song was covered by Lulu in 2015, who must have forgiven him for the *Hey Joe* debacle

9 KILLING FLOOR

Howlin' Wolf's 1964 Chicago blues classic had been in Hendrix's repertoire for a few years before he formed the Experience. Its fiendishly intricate warp-speed blend of rhythm and lead rolled into one had prompted no less a light than Eric Clapton to simply put his guitar down and walk away when Hendrix jammed with Cream on his first week in London.

He also chose this song to begin his set at the 1967 Monterey International Pop Music Festival, the perfect gateway to an audiovisual assault of feedback, blues, psychedelia and shamanistic showmanship that culminated in the iconic sacrifice of his Strat to the flames. Yet, if anything, it's the *BBC Sessions* version that's the most definitive – it's one of the greatest pieces of showing off ever commited to tape.

SHAKING THINGS UP

Jeff Beck was blown away when he first saw Hendrix's playing too. "It wasn't just his amazing blues playing but his physical assault on the guitar," said Beck. "He hit me like an earthquake. I had to think long and hard about what I should do next"

8 HEAR MY TRAIN A COMIN'

This track was a throwback to the Delta blues that Jimi recorded and played live throughout his career, most often through his trademark prism of psychedelia. However, a version filmed for the 1968 documentary *Experience* (also known as *See My Music Talking*) reveals the icon in a markedly different context.

For the footage recorded during a publicity shoot at a London photography studio, Hendrix kind of plays along with the setup (its 'impromptu' nature is somewhat undermined by the presence of a downtuned lefty-strung Zemaitis 12-string). After a false start that sees him sound out the 12-string with a plectrum and his thumb, however, he settles into a heartfelt performance that channels the spirit of the ancient country blues of the likes of Blind Blake and Lead Belly, seemingly filmed from a guitarist's perspective with deliberate attention to the details of his playing style.

GOLD STANDARD

Hendrix rarely recorded acoustic, which makes the 1970 tapes of him playing ideas on a Martin acoustic, which were given to Mitch Mitchell and are known as the Black Gold tapes, legendary among collectors

7 THE WIND CRIES MARY

Twenty minutes, from a standing start. According to Chas Chandler, that's how long it took Hendrix, Mitchell and Redding to record *The Wind Cries Mary* – a song that had been written the night before and that the rhythm section were hearing for the very first time. That 20 minutes, by the way, also incorporated five guitar overdubs, including a breathtakingly lyrical solo.

While listening to the isolated tracks from behind the mixing desk years later, Eddie Kramer summed it up. "It's really a tribute to Jimi and his ability as a great musician," he said. "You're dealing with a genius, for crying out loud, it's just so obvious. He was just so able to get into the moment."

HOT POTATO

If Jimi's girlfriend Kathy Mary Etchingham could mash potatoes properly, the song may never have existed. "We'd had a row over food," she told *Q* in 2013. "Jimi didn't like lumpy mashed potato. There were thrown plates and I ran off. When I came back the next day, he'd written that song about me. It's incredibly flattering"

6 1983... (A MERMAN I SHOULD TURN TO BE)

Despite being recorded little more than a year later, the ambitious centrepiece of *Electric Ladyland*, which runs at 13:39, is in every respect a world away from the previous song in this list. A vision of a couple escaping from a ruined society oppressed by "giant pencil- and lipstick-tube-shaped things [Danelectro pickups?]" to return to the sea, where "starfish and giant foams" greet its protagonists with a smile, *1983…* is a poetic expression of Hendrix's fixation with sci-fi imagery.

Eddie Kramer helped provide the suitably epic and futuristic sonic landscape, which he describes as a "huge sonic painting". Among its flutes, drum and bass solos, ragas, sculpted feedback, tape experiments and general psychedelic surrealism, there's something new to discover on every listen.

RENAISSANCE MERMAN

As well as guitar, Jimi played bass and percussion on the track, which also features Traffic's Chris Wood on flute

5 THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

"It's not unorthodox! I thought it was beautiful," said a sleep-deprived Hendrix to US TV talkshow host Dick Cavett when asked about his performance of the US national anthem at Woodstock in 1969. The guitarist headlined the festival at 8am on the Monday morning – going on after rock 'n' roll doo-wop group Sha Na Na – to a thinning crowd strewn across a misty field. Despite this, he was still able to summon a fierce and richly onomatopoeic orchestration of the anthem from his 1968 Strat – and this was towards the end of the set. US author Greil Marcus later described the moment as "significant in American discourse, whether cultural or political".

When the soundtrack of the festival came out, the world projected its opinion onto the performance. Was it intended to be anti-American? Was it a protest against the Vietnam war? Was it a 'cry of despair and love', to paraphrase Bob Dylan's reaction to it? Whatever his true intentions were, Jimi wasn't about to reveal them. "I'm an American, so I played it," he shrugged to Cavett in the same interview. One thing's for sure: it's the most politically charged guitar solo in history.

SKY'S THE LIMIT

Hendrix and his new band only had time for two rehearsals before Woodstock. On stage, he introduced them as both Gypsy Sun and Rainbows, and Sky Church

4 MACHINE GUN

Hendrix wasn't quite done with his guitar-as-warfare soundscaping. His post-Experience trio, rounded out by Billy Cox on bass and Buddy Miles on drums, proved to be a short-lived experimental fusion of R&B, funk and rock. Their debut shows at the Fillmore East in New York on 31 December 1969 and 1 January 1970 were edited into their only release.

Yet *Band Of Gypsys* reveals how Hendrix had evolved into a formidably freeform live improviser, effortlessly channelling his unconscious impulses into music. On the harrowing 12-minute *Machine Gun*, he unleashes a metaphorical payload of Cry Baby, Arbiter Fuzz-Face, Octavia, Uni-Vibe, vibrato arm and stacks to marshal a dynamic, fluid and expressive assault on the senses that, to this day, remains unrivalled in its attitude and intensity.

LOADED STATEMENT

On New Year's Eve 1969, Hendrix dedicated *Machine Gun* to "all the soldiers that are fighting in Chicago, Milwaukee and New York... oh, yes, and all the soldiers fighting in Vietnam"

© Helmut Reiss / United Archives via Getty Images

3 LITTLE WING

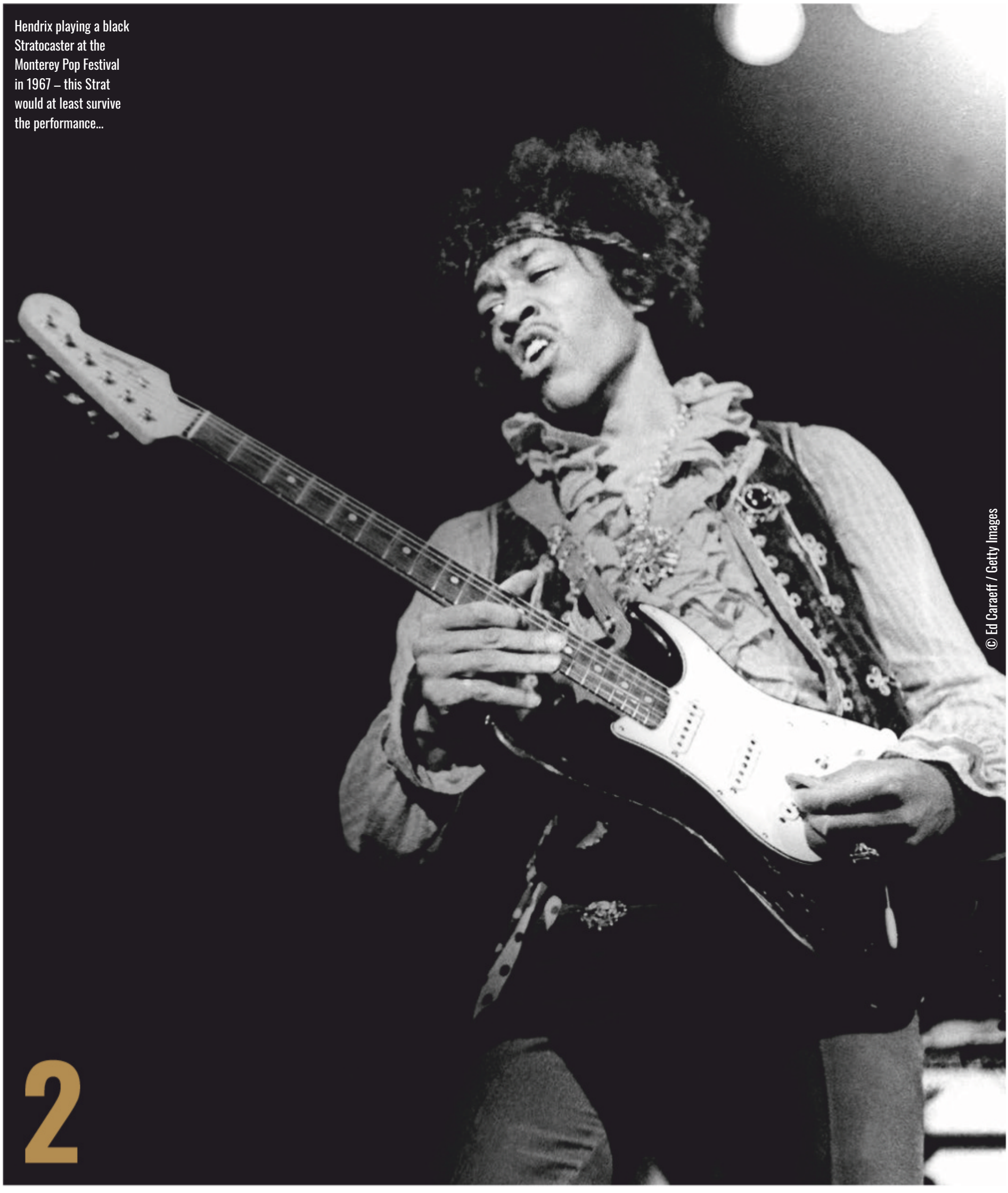
The venerable Stratocaster may be feeling a little left out of players' affections of late but anyone who's ever found themselves dismissing the instrument should listen to the intro to this song and beg forgiveness. It's a thing of beauty, maybe even the archetypal 'in-between' Strat sound.

While the band were working on their initial takes of *Little Wing* in the studio, Chas Chandler suggested that Jimi shorten the song and tone down the more gung-ho elements of its execution; Hendrix took note, shortening it (perhaps too much) but doubling its impact in the process, allowing the glockenspiel countermelody and the telling use of a Leslie speaker more room to breathe.

"It shows the increasing range of Hendrix's ability to compose a beautiful ballad that will probably last for generations to come," said Eddie Kramer, who cites this as his favourite Jimi track. "In the year 3000, we'll probably still be listening to *Little Wing*."

RARE BIRDS

Little Wing was one of only two songs from *Axis: Bold As Love* that the Experience regularly played live. The other was *Spanish Castle Magic*



Hendrix playing a black Stratocaster at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 – this Strat would at least survive the performance...

© Ed Caraeff / Getty Images

2

VOODOO CHILD (SLIGHT RETURN)

The last track on his final studio album, *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)* was Jimi's first posthumous single and only UK No1. Recorded the day after a jam with Steve Winwood and Jack Casady had yielded the 15-minute masterpiece *Voodoo Chile*, *Slight Return* was created while the Experience were being filmed for an ABC TV doc.

"Somebody was filming us as we were doing that," Hendrix told *Rolling Stone* at the time. "We weren't thinking about what we were playing. We did it like three times." Somehow, the footage was lost but without the presence of the film crew, the song – in all its diabolical, feral, wah-soaked glory – may never have been heard at all.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

As one of Hendrix's most well-known hits, *Slight Return* has no shortage of admirers. "It's just the greatest piece of electric-guitar work ever recorded," said Joe Satriani. "In fact, the whole song could be considered the Holy Grail of guitar expression and technique"

1 ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

Few covers improve on the original but even fewer transcend the song they were based on to anything like the extent this does. Jimi's version of this 1967 Bob Dylan classic remains a perfect expression of his musical vision, even though it sees him venturing out of his comfort zone – in more ways than one.

All Along The Watchtower not only features acoustic guitars, it also features another guitarist, Dave Mason, playing a 12-string. It boasts an upside-down bassline recorded by Hendrix on the absent Noel Redding's right-handed P-Bass, and sports a slide guitar part in regular tuning performed using a cigarette lighter. The track took 27 takes and was completed in a second studio. Hendrix even had to fend off a drunken Rolling Stone who had strayed into the studio to offer unwanted piano services.

Whatever the obstacles to the alchemy, though, it's ultimately the song's five interlinked guitar interludes that elevate it to another plane. Each is progressively more urgent than the last: the swooping, soaring bends of the first set the scene for the octaves and unison bends of the second, which give way to the haunting delayed Hawaiian slide section. Then the manic wah-blues of the third culminates in a scratchy, funky release before the final solo builds to frantic tremolo-picked high notes that encapsulate the song's apocalyptic theme. Musically varied, emotionally charged, technically mindblowing and stunningly individual, Jimi's inimitable version of *All Along The Watchtower* is the crowning achievement of the greatest electric-guitar player in history.

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KEEPING WATCH

The brilliance of Hendrix's interpretation was famously acknowledged by Dylan himself, who has since always played it closer to Jimi's arrangement than his own (it's also the song he's performed the most in concert)

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

1969 FENDER ROSEWOOD TELECASTER

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Late 1960s Telecasters are not especially rare or collectable – unless, of course, they happen to have a rosewood body and neck like the guitar George Harrison played on the roof of the Apple building in 1969

The superb sonic qualities of rosewood have long been known to acoustic guitar makers, but rosewood is usually deemed unsuitable for electric guitar bodies because it's too heavy and expensive. However, the latter isn't much of a concern when you're making a handful of instruments for some of the biggest names in contemporary music.

That's certainly how it must have seemed to Fender when employees Roger Rossmeisl and Phil Kubicki were tasked with building some very special instruments indeed. According to most accounts, four Rosewood guitars were made initially: two Stratocasters and two Telecasters. The best of the Strats was earmarked for Jimi Hendrix but he died before it could be presented to him. According to some, Elvis returned his Telecaster because it was so heavy – and a Rosewood Tele said to have been sent to the King went unsold at auction in 2018.

Fender's head of sales, Don Randall, had been trying to get the company's instruments and amplifiers into the hands of The Beatles for quite some time. Their manager Brian Epstein, however, was notoriously prescriptive about the equipment that he'd allow his charges to be seen using.

ABOVE TOP This Rosewood Tele has been refitted with original F-stamped tuners and vintage bushings

ABOVE LEFT Although George's Rosewood Tele must have sported a veneer or slab 'board, this example features a one-piece rosewood neck

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £14,995 (inc original case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-solid body electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Indian rosewood/maple sandwich body, bolt-on one-piece Indian rosewood neck, pearloid dot inlays
HARDWARE 3-saddle bridge with steel saddles, F-stamped tuners
ELECTRICS 2x single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.4mm at nut, 50.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.5mm at first fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 33.9mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.55kg/7.82lb
FINISH Clear gloss polyurethane
CONTACT atbguitars.com

After Epstein's death, Randall finally secured a meeting at Apple HQ and an agreement was made to supply The Beatles with a load of Fender gear, including a Rosewood Telecaster for George.

Randall and The Fab Four met in summer 1968, and a courier boarded a London-bound plane with George's Tele in the seat next to him later that year. George famously used it on *Let It Be* and the Rosewood Tele can be seen throughout the film that documented the sessions, along with the rooftop concert that would prove to be the group's final public performance.

In a manner typical of rock stars of that era, George gifted the Rosewood Tele to Delaney Bramlett in 1969. Bramlett eventually sold it at auction in 2003, and the guitar is now owned by George's widow Olivia.

The initial run of guitars can be considered prototypes, and only the Telecaster went onto become an official production model. It was launched in 1969 but only lasted a couple of years, and there were several points of difference between the prototypes and production models such as the 1969 example featured here.

The most obvious is that George's guitar had a satin finish but our Rosewood Tele has the gloss poly paint job that would have been standard in 1969.

Compare the necks and you'll notice that this guitar has a contrasting maple headstock plug and skunk stripe along the back. This is significant because it indicates that Fender returned to making 1950s-style one-piece Telecaster necks. When George's Rosewood Tele was made, rosewood veneer 'boards were standard and 'maple necks' could be custom-ordered with the maple fingerboard glued on. George's must have had either a rosewood veneer or slab 'board.

Less obvious is the fact that Fender did something to minimise the weight issue, and given Rossmeisl's background at Rickenbacker and his design work on the Telecaster Thinline in 1968, you might be able to guess what that was.

Production Rosewood Teles had chambered bodies and this example weighs in at a comfortable 3.55kg – the guitar given to Elvis is reported to have tipped the scales at 5.9kg. The Fender Custom Shop's video of the Harrison Tele reveals another interesting fact:

ABOVE This Telecaster's wiring and pickups appear to be 100 per cent original

it was made from four pieces of Indian rosewood jointed together with a thin layer of maple in between.

Our Telecaster body was almost certainly made with two pieces of rosewood, and the grain lines are carefully arranged to create a mirror-image effect on each side of the maple line. Despite the finish being rather roadworn, the look evokes sophisticated Scandinavian furniture of the era. It's definitely more Danish sideboard than Bakersfield bar-room bruiser.

At some point the tuners were changed but the Tele's current custodian ATB Guitars has refitted original F-stamped tuners and vintage bushings. Telltale signs include some rash around the smaller vintage bushings and a couple of screw holes peeking out from the edges of the high and low E tuner casings.

This guitar still has its original frets, however, and they are far from worn out. A light crowning might enhance playability a bit but it's not a big issue. Like all lacquered fretboards, this one shows some wear. It's mostly confined to the bass side of the 'board under the E and A strings, which suggests that its owner was strictly rhythm and tended to favour barre chords.

Lifting the control plate reveals extensive chambering inside the body, with the front thickness measuring about 7.5mm. The wiring all appears to be 100 per cent original, including the two yellow bridge-pickup wires. The pickups look right too. The white string that wraps the bridge coil even looks unusually pristine.

The potentiometers are one-meg rather than 250k units. Fender instigated this change in 1969, so George's Tele, with 250k pots and a solid rather than chambered body, would have had some significant sonic differences. If you're chasing George's late Beatles tones specifically, then it's worth bearing that in mind.

There's also some case candy, in the form of a 1984 receipt for 12,000F from Dadi's Music House in Paris, and a handwritten note proclaiming that the guitar was located in the south of France near Bayonne.

IN USE

Although this is essentially a rosewood Telecaster Thinline sans f-hole, the chambering isn't especially noticeable in the guitar's unplugged tone. Instead, it sustains like a solidbody and has a clear chime, as well as plenty of warmth in the low mids.

We have mixed feelings about the amped-up sounds because the one-meg pots help with neck-pickup clarity but bring out a wiriness from the bridge unit. It has a very quick response and it's one of those Tele bridge tones that just cries out for a compressor.

We feel that the rosewood has far more influence on the look than the sound; there's nothing radically different about this guitar's sonic character compared to traditionally appointed Teles of the era. It's perhaps less punchy and aggressive than mid-60s solidbody Teles can be, and it's fatter and warmer than a Thinline, but it's still every inch a late 1960s Telecaster.

The full and rounded neck profile delivers a lovely playing feel and it sounds like a very nice if unexceptional old Tele. With 250k pots it could be an even better one, but it's almost entirely the rarity of the rosewood that makes this guitar so special.

The history of

DENMARK STREET

From Tin Pan Alley to an iconic guitar-shopping destination, London's Denmark Street is a key part of the city's musical history. As the road prepares to enter a new phase, we look back at its iconic past

WORDS TONY BACON

Let's take a walk down Denmark Street. Turn the corner from Charing Cross Road in central London, and you're faced with 100 yards of musical history. Right now, though, you'd be better off with a hard hat than a hard case. The street is under siege from a massive redevelopment, and the never-ending Crossrail development already engulfs a good deal of the surrounding area. Today, Denmark Street is in the process of transformation.

Continue your walk and, as you shield your ears from construction noise, carefully dodge the builders' trucks and navigate the many pedestrian diversions, you may be able to sense the historical importance of this place, especially if you have a vivid and active imagination and a keen eye for architectural detail. Today, though, some of its premises are boarded up, and most of the shops that are open have seen their proprietors' lives turned almost literally upside down.

Through the years, Denmark Street has had at least three important musical lives. The first, lasting from the 19th century well into the late 20th, was as the home of the professional song business. The second, and the one we're most interested in, began in the mid-1960s, as the street started to attract music-shop owners and thrived in the following decades as a key destination for guitarists and would-be players. The third of Denmark Street's lives is underway right now and planned for the near future. Once the dust has finally settled, the street frontages will remain but there will be a series of new venues. Hopefully, there will still be plenty of guitar shops among them.

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FARFISA Compact Organ	£145	RESLO Mikes, from	£8
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CREDIT FACILITIES — PART EXCHANGE

ALL GROUP EQUIPMENT BOUGHT FOR CASH, WILL CALL

In December 2014, Pete Townshend wrote an open letter. "In the 60s, I bought fuzzboxes and strings for my guitars from Macari's guitar shop in Denmark Street," he said. "The Who did a backing-vocal rehearsal with Shel Talmy in Denmark Street at Regent Sound in 1964. I used to shop at the Drum Store when living in nearby Wardour Street, Soho. Boris Johnson [London mayor at the time of Pete's letter] and Camden Council, please make Denmark Street a Heritage Zone. Otherwise a massive chunk of rock music history will be lost forever. Progress is important but so are the local landmarks of our great city."

The Save Tin Pan Alley campaign, supported not only by Townshend but by many other iconic musicians, stated that there is "no equivalent" to Denmark Street "anywhere in the world", and that the city should make efforts to celebrate it and bring more music back to further bolster its diversity.

The property developer reckons the result of its own efforts will be "a successful new quarter that will enrich and integrate with the surrounding well-established neighbourhood… and not only safeguard but reinvigorate the area's music and cultural scene". Time will tell. Everything comes and goes.

BACK IN THE DAY

Let's take a walk down Denmark Street in the 1970s. It had remained at the centre of the song business for some time, with many leading publishers based in rooms, offices and cubbyholes up and down the street's terraced buildings, the earliest of which date back to the 17th century. The inhabitants included old hands such as Lawrence Wright ("You can't go wrong with the Wright songs") and Mills Music, where a 17-year-old Elton John, still known as Reggie Dwight, once had a job making tea.

© Tony Bacon, W Warner

There were arrangers, copyists and musicians too, plus publications: Lawrence Wright started *Melody Maker* at number 19 in 1926 but relocated to Long Acre soon after. *NME* moved to number 5 in 1952 but also shifted to Long Acre in '64. Denmark Street became known as Tin Pan Alley, a reference to the US's original song-biz area in New York, named for the racket made by its many pianists pounding out their potential new hits.

There were a few music shops in Denmark Street before the rock boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Francis Day & Hunter at number 23, for example, was advertising Gibson guitars in the 1930s. But the first we'd recognise as a proper guitar shop was probably Musical Exchange, run by Joe and Larry Macari, who already had a few shops in the north-west reaches of outer London. They knew, though, that the centre of town was the place to be, and opened at number 22 in the early months of 1965. Tone Bender inventor Gary Hurst believes it was here, in the back of this shop, that he made those first fuzz boxes, and it was Musical Exchange that marked the start of Denmark Street's shift in businesses.

The next significant arrival was Top Gear, opened at number 5 by Craig and Rod Bradley in March 1969. Sid Bishop, former guitarist in Mick Farren's The Deviants, started there in 1971. Top Gear was untidy but that was part of its charm. "If you'd gone into Sound City on Shaftesbury Avenue or Selmer's on Charing Cross Road," says Sid, "it'd be spotless. A lot of your hairy muso types would be put off going into shops like that. In a place like Top Gear, if anybody said anything wrong, they'd get a bloody mouthful."

At first, what stock there was in Top Gear was all second-hand. "Originally, Rod and Craig couldn't get accounts with the leading wholesalers for new guitars, so we depended on people coming into the shop and offering us stuff," says Sid. "There was no vintage collector's market. That came later. We'd buy an SG Junior for 50 quid and stick it on the wall for 95. I'd buy a Firebird V for 200 quid and stick it on the wall for 300. It was a nice atmosphere, and Rod and Craig were fair guys."

Top Gear was a social centre too. Townshend, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Bernie Marsden, Mick Ralphs, Luther Grosvenor, all were regular visitors. Hank Marvin, too. "A lot of it was word of mouth," says Sid. "Hank became a very good friend of ours. He used to come in a lot. He never bought anything. He'd come in, have a cup of tea, have a chat and sit down for a noodle. He was a lovely guy – but I don't think he ever spent a penny in our shop."

ABOVE LEFT An advert for Top Gear's opening in 1969, as featured in one-time Denmark St resident *Melody Maker*

PICTURED Number 20 amid the surrounding demolition, March 2020

ABOVE RIGHT Top Gear staff full of Christmas cheer outside number 5 December 1971

RIGHT Top Gear – or should that be Tp Ar? – in 1971

ABOVE Top Gear manager Sid Bishop in 1971

RIGHT Number 23's Francis, Day & Hunter promoted Gibson's star names back in 1937

So who did put their hands in their pockets? "Jimmy Page bought a Les Paul Custom, Chris Spedding, too," says Sid, misty eyed. "Micky Grabham bought a sunburst '59 Standard. Eddy Grant also bought a Standard, Marc Bolan a Custom, a Flying V and a white Strat. Keith Richards bought a National resonator, an old Rickenbacker solidbody, a Les Paul Custom and an Everly Brothers or a J-200, one or the other."

Bob Marley's Les Paul Special was one among many guitars that passed through Top Gear. They'd bought it from Dan Armstrong and sold it on to Marc Bolan – but he soon came back for something with humbuckers and swapped it for a Les Paul Custom. Then Bob Marley bought it, on his first UK tour in '73. "He'd only had it a little while," says Sid, "and it fell forward off a guitar stand – the selector switch punched right through the rhythm/treble surround. Bob brought it in and said, 'Look what I've done'. Oh, you silly boy, Bob! We showed it to Roger Giffin in our back room and he cut out and fitted a new surround. We gave the guitar back to Bob and said, 'Here you are – you won't do that again' and he was over the moon."

Top Gear closed in 1978, as the Bradley brothers shifted their efforts over to their Strings & Things wholesale company, and number 5 became Roka's, run by Top Gear's amp fixer Ron Roka.

As for Sid, he worked briefly for Boogie Music before going over to Chappell's on Bond Street and staying until 1986. Later, he moved to the US, where he worked at Pete's Guitars with collector and dealer Pete Alenov in Minneapolis–Saint Paul. These days, retired and living in Crete, he's a far cry from the bustle of 1970s Denmark Street – but he has written a so-far-unpublished book about it.

"ALL I'M TRYING TO DO IS BALANCE RUNNING A GOOD GUITAR SHOP WITH RAISING AWARENESS OF THE HISTORY OF THE STUDIO AND THE STREET AS A WHOLE" CRISPIN WEIR, REGENT SOUNDS

ABOVE Crispin Weir stands proudly at the entrance to his Regent Sounds Studio shop at number 4, 2020

© Tony Bacon, W Warner

ANOTHER BEAT BOOM

Let's take a walk down Denmark Street in the 1980s, the beginning of Cliff Cooper's spree. He'd had his famous Orange shop, birthplace of the amps of the same name, on nearby New Compton Street but that closed in '78. Then he opened Rhodes Music, his first shop on Denmark Street at number 22. "When I first went into the street, it was almost derelict and still nearly all music publishers," Cliff recalls. "There was the Giaconda restaurant at number 9, where a lot of the bands hung out. They'd park on Denmark Street – there were no yellow lines in those days – sleep in their vans overnight and play the Marquee the next evening. Bedford vans everywhere!"

In 1989, Cliff took over a second shop, number 21. EMI had moved its sound library out of the building, and Cliff swooped in and replaced it with the hi-tech Sutekina (which means beautiful in Japanese), later renting the basement out to Gibson. Cliff was busy in the 1990s too. He created the PA Centre at number 23 in 1990, formerly a Forbidden Planet, and two years later turned Argent's keyboard store at 20 into a brass, woodwind and sheet-music shop. He opened World of Pianos at 8, previously Southern Music, in '94 and took over Hanks acoustics shop, which remained at number 24, in '95. A year later, Cliff moved Sutekina to number 10, with 21 becoming a second Rhodes Music, and he opened a neighbouring bass shop at 22. In '98, he launched a drum and merchandise shop at 28, where he located his office on the fourth floor, while his basement at number 23 became auction rooms. Finally, he opened five floors at the Rose-Morris shop (11) in 1999.

ABOVE Hanks – one of Denmark St's surviving guitar shops – at number 27

FACING PAGE In the 1960s, Regent Sound was a busy studio at number 4. Famous visitors included The Rolling Stones, who recorded their third single there

Cliff had turned Denmark Street into a sort of horizontal musical department store. "Each shop was a specialist shop," he says. "By now the street was getting so busy. It was just music everywhere." The money was rolling in too, hundreds of thousands a week, almost all in cash. "There was no shortage of villains in that area," adds Cliff, with a laugh. This saw him devise an ingenious cash-transfer system that made the most of his run of shops on the north side, from Hanks at 24 to Argent's at 20. They knocked holes through from shop to shop and installed a pneumatic pod-in-a-tube system. "We'd send all the money through to Argent's at the end, where it would be counted," he says, "and then we had to get it from there to the bank around the corner. We had three people with bags. The money was in one of them, the other two were decoys."

In the 1990s, Cliff came up with a plan to buy Denmark Street. He had leases on a lot of it anyway, so why not? The freehold owner suggested a figure of about £11m. "I was going to pave it across and turn it into a music street, a real music-theme scene for the world," says Cliff. "I was so excited." He got close to raising the funds but was beaten to it by Consolidated Developments, which acquired the site in 1996 and is behind the current redevelopment.

Meanwhile, Cliff was thinking about reviving Orange Amps, which had waned in the 80s. In the late 90s, with the help of Adrian Emsley, he began to design a new range. "It was lucky," he says. "Noel Gallagher of Oasis came into one of my shops. He'd used Orange to record their first two albums, and he was looking for Orange amps. We introduced him to Adrian and, between us, we came out with a design he wanted, shaped to his sound. He bought it and used it on TV. That launched us again! Orange was reborn on Denmark Street, designed in the back of number 22."

With Orange's resurgence to deal with, Cliff sold his Denmark Street shops, several of which went to Rick and Justin Harrison of Music Ground. By 2006, Cliff had left the street altogether. By about 2000, Rick had acquired number 5, turning Roka's into Rockers. Later, he started taking over other shops, including numbers 22, 23, 24, and 25 from Cliff, as well as number 4. Meanwhile, Chris Bryant took over a print shop at the corner of Charing Cross Road, and Wunjo went into number 20. Andy's, a fixture at number 27 since the 1970s and run by Andy Preston, became Music Ground, then Hanks, which moved from 24. In the following years, Denmark Street continued to build its image as a magnet for visiting guitar fans.

CHANGING TIMES

We're back in Denmark Street today and, as it is anywhere, it's hard work on many levels to keep a music shop going here. Among the hoardings and hard hats, you'll still see Wunjo (guitars) on the corner of Charing Cross Road; Music Room (sheet-music) at number 19; Westside MI (guitars) at number 23; Hanks (guitars) at number 27; and Sixty Sixty Sounds (guitars) at 28. Over the road, there's another Music Room, as well as Stairway To Kevin (repairs) at number 11; Rose-Morris at 8 (guitars and drums) and 10 (pianos); No.Tom (guitars) at number 6; Wunjo again at 5; and Regent Sounds (guitars) and Noden (repairs) at number 4. All battle daily with the redevelopment chaos and, at the time of writing, there was also the uncertainty and restrictions of COVID-19 to worry about.

Crispin Weir at Regent Sounds says the works are set to continue for at least another year or two, adding that the developers are aware of and sensitive to the historical importance of the street. If they were going to turn it into wall-to-wall Starbucks, he says, they could have done that years before the redevelopment process started. Crispin's understanding is that Consolidated Developments owner Laurence Kirschel wants to create a sort of music quarter.

"Like all landlords, they're under huge pressure to make the development a success, and that will involve a lot of commercialisation," says Crispin. "It will mean significant change for the street, both good and bad. It remains to be seen whether the shops will be able to afford the future rents but we hope the potential of Consolidated's Outernet 'immersive media space' and the draw of the venues will be great for musicians and fans alike, hopefully giving us enough trade to keep going."

Crispin grew up in London's West End as a teenager and, like many, he trod the boards and was stuck to guitar-shop windows. He started working at Regent Sounds in 2004 before he took over the shop six years later, by which time he'd become fascinated by the history of the place. Like most buildings on the street, it has a star-studded past. But perhaps no other building has quite the same significance as the former home of Regent Sound recording studio.

The studio was established in 1951, primarily as a demo studio and photographic studio for session musicians and the street's publishing business – a requirement that prompted other studios to follow at numbers 8 (Southern Music), 9 (Central Sound), 21 (KPM, whose legendary library music instrumentals were recorded there) and 22 (Pan/TPA).

Regent went on to become one of London's busiest studios. In the 1960s, it was run by James Baring, who hired Bill Farley. Bill engineered the first Rolling Stones album there, recorded in its entirety at Regent across a few days in early '64, as well as most of the band's second LP. "The first one was done all in England," Keith Richards later told *Rolling Stone* magazine,

"[BANDS] WOULD PARK ON DENMARK STREET – THERE WERE NO YELLOW LINES IN THOSE DAYS – SLEEP IN THEIR VANS OVERNIGHT AND PLAY THE MARQUEE THE NEXT EVENING. BEDFORD VANS EVERYWHERE!" CLIFF COOPER, ORANGE AMPS CEO

"in a little demo studio in Tin Pan Alley, as it used to be called. Denmark Street in Soho. We used to think, 'Oh, this is a recording studio? This is what they're like?' A tiny little backroom." The little room was good enough to conjure demos and records for everyone from Vera Lynn to Black Sabbath, from Petula Clark to Jimi Hendrix, and from The Kinks to Bananarama, until it closed in the 1980s.

After that, number 4 became a print shop for a while. Then, in 1995, it opened as the Helter Skelter music bookshop. That lasted until 2003. In the first weeks of the following year, Rick Harrison opened it as the Regent Sounds Studio guitar shop. Crispin recalls a Russian oligarch who used to come in with his daughter. "She just pointed at stuff and he'd go, 'We take it', 'We take it', 'We take it'. He bought most of the shop. Sadly, that never happened again."

These days, Crispin looks forward to Joe Walsh's regular visits. "He walks along and puts his hand up to a guitar on the wall, lifts it and goes, 'I won't take that one'. Next one, he lifts and goes, 'I'll take that one'. Next one, 'I'll take that one'. Next one, 'I won't take that one'. It's very entertaining. He's a living legend."

For Crispin and for many more of the street's fans, Denmark Street will only have a viable future – with its three new venues, fancy hotel and all the rest – if the parties concerned manage to get it right.

"All I'm trying to do," Crispin says with commendable modesty, "is balance running a good guitar shop with raising awareness of the history of the studio and the street as a whole. It's an incredibly special place and I feel passionately about protecting it for future generations, until it's my turn to hand the baton on. It's a difficult balancing act, running a business here, especially now. But trying to appeal to tourists, professional musicians and beginners alike is a longstanding tradition, and one that I'm honoured to be a part of. The future of Denmark Street, to me, is a matter of trying to get the balance right for everybody."

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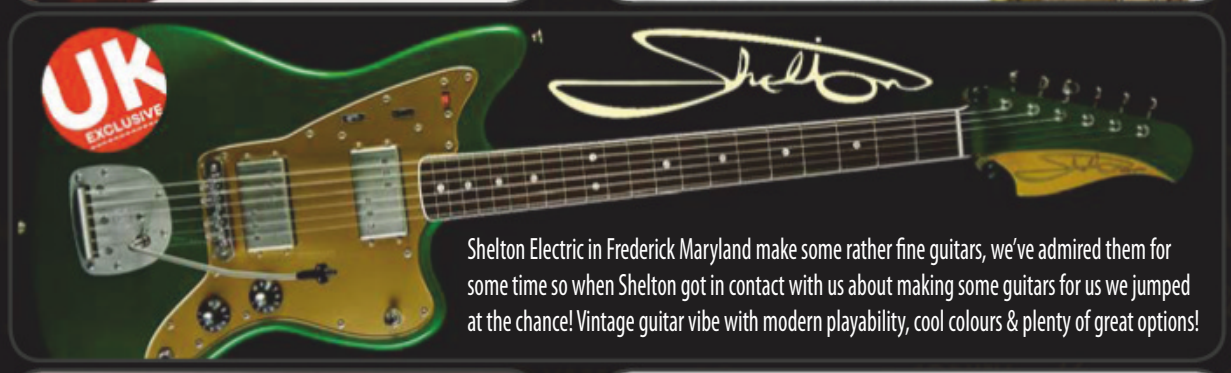

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FENDER

70TH ANNIVERSARY BROADCASTER

WORDS HUW PRICE

Like Bursts, White Penguins, Flying Vs and Explorers, the Fender Broadcaster is one of the holy grails of vintage guitar collecting. Most of us will never get the chance to see one in the flesh, let alone play one, so Fender's 70th Anniversary production model might be the next best thing

It's a misconception that the Broadcaster was Fender's first electric guitar. That distinction goes to the Esquire. The Broadcaster, then, was actually Fender's first commercially available dual-pickup electric guitar – although a few Esquires did leave the factory with two pickups.

The earliest Esquire necks had no truss rods but musicians returning to California from the Deep South via Canada complained that the necks were susceptible to temperature fluctuations. Leo conceded and reinforcement was added accordingly. Pancake pine bodies were another early Esquire feature, but all Broadcasters had ash bodies.

One prototype (serial number 0009) reveals that Fender was considering a dual-pickup design perhaps as early as 1949. It was owned by a Fender amplifier builder by the name of Sam Hutton, who used it to test amps, and it was mostly made from lap steel parts – including a lap steel pickup in the neck position.

Eventually, Fender would go on to develop a metal-covered neck pickup, which has remained a firm fixture on Broadcasters, Nocasters and Telecasters ever since. But what are the differences between these three iconic models? Besides a wire channel drilled from the neck pocket to the bridge

Ashes to ashes: beneath the 'ashtray' bridge cover you'll find a Custom Shop Designed pickup

pickup rout – rather than a diagonal wire rout – and steel saddles on the earliest Broadcasters, it boils down to the headstock decal and the wiring.

Fender had to change the Broadcaster name after Gretsch pointed out via telegram that the Brooklyn company was already using 'Broadkaster' for a line of drums and banjos. It's been suggested that Leo's frugality was the reason he had the Broadcaster name snipped from the decals, and the resulting guitars – with 'Fender' the only word on their headstocks – became known as Nocasters.

Though Fender needed to stop using the Broadcaster name, it didn't have to stop producing guitars. Since the company had no other model at that time, and no decision on a new name had been taken, modifying the decals kept the production line moving.

Presumably the new name, 'Telecaster', began appearing once the original batch of decals ran out in autumn 1951. It's thought that around 200 Broadcasters were made between late 1950 and early 1951. Demand for Fender guitars was increasing, so the number of Nocasters and Telecasters built in 1951 alone greatly exceeds the total number of original Broadcasters that were made.

As for the wiring circuit, the scheme devised for the two-pickup Esquires and Broadcasters had a master volume but no tone control. Instead, the neck pickup was tied to a treble bleed capacitor for a pseudo bass tone. The middle position selected the bridge pickup and the back position and combined both pickups, with the second knob acting as a blend.

All the Nocasters had this wiring too, as did the earliest Telecasters, but Fender changed the circuit sometime around May 1952. The bassy neck preset was retained, with the middle and back positions corresponding to the neck and bridge pickups individually – both of which were connected to the tone control.

Other Broadcaster features include closed-shell Kluson tuners, misaligned string ferrules and maple truss-rod plugs, but that's about it.

Component parts: the tone capacitor is a paper-in-oil type

HANDS ON

We recently had the rare opportunity to spend some time with an original 1950 Broadcaster courtesy of ATB Guitars and, with that instrument still firmly lodged in our memory banks, we're delighted to get our mitts on another Broadcaster, this one 70 years its junior. As anticipated, Fender has done a tremendous job on the decal and various other features associated with Broadcasters, but not everything is quite as it was. In some regards, that's no bad thing.

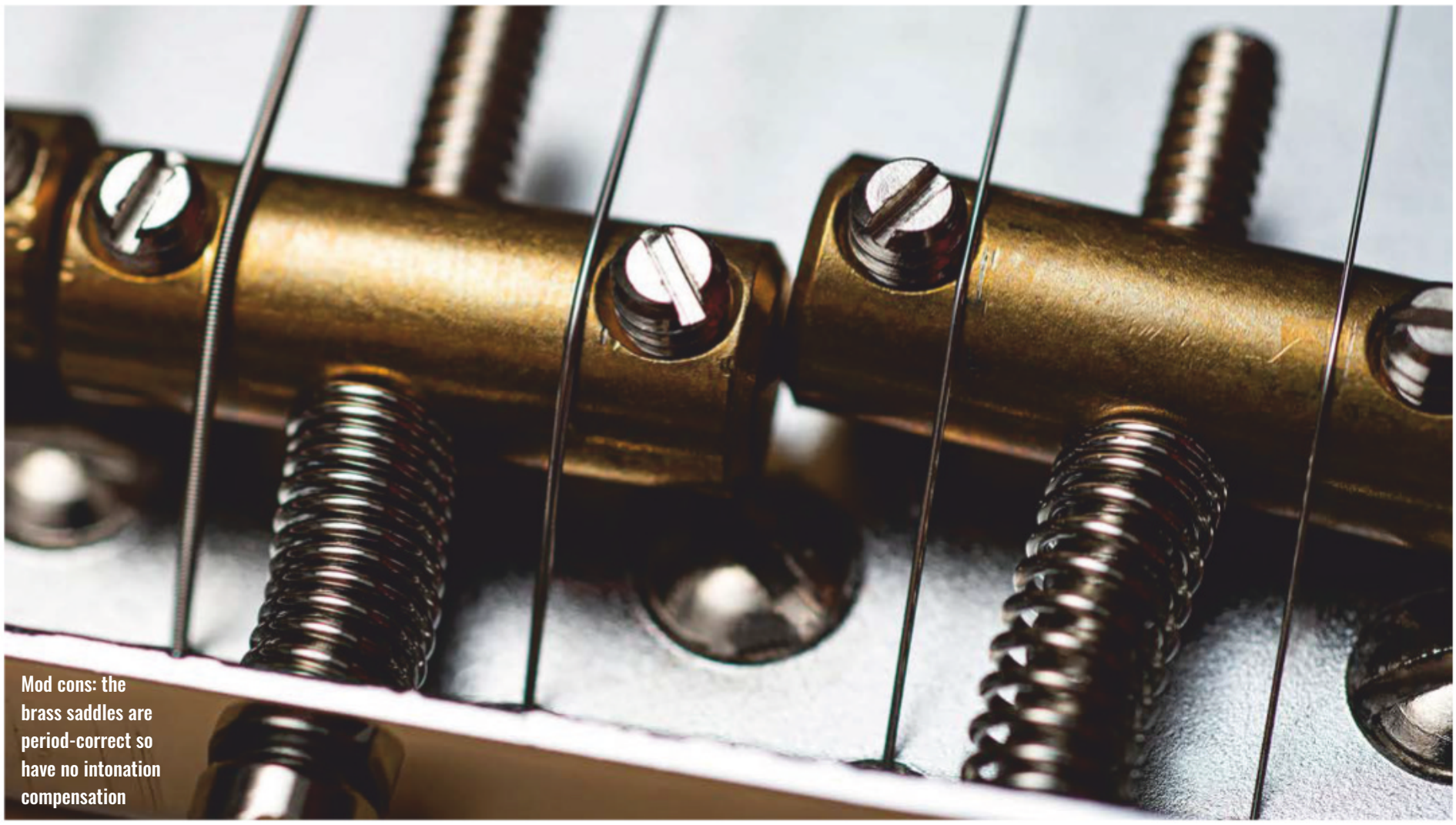
Broad appeal: the 70th Anniversary Broadcaster is a faithful update

Let's begin by establishing the points of similarity. The one-piece maple neck is a key ingredient, while ash was Fender's body wood of choice until the latter half of 1956. This body appears to be made from a single piece and, although the colour may be a little pale compared to the darker 'butterscotch' generally associated with early Fender guitars, the grain lines have a vintage-correct blue-grey look. Nitrocellulose lacquer is used for the body and neck.

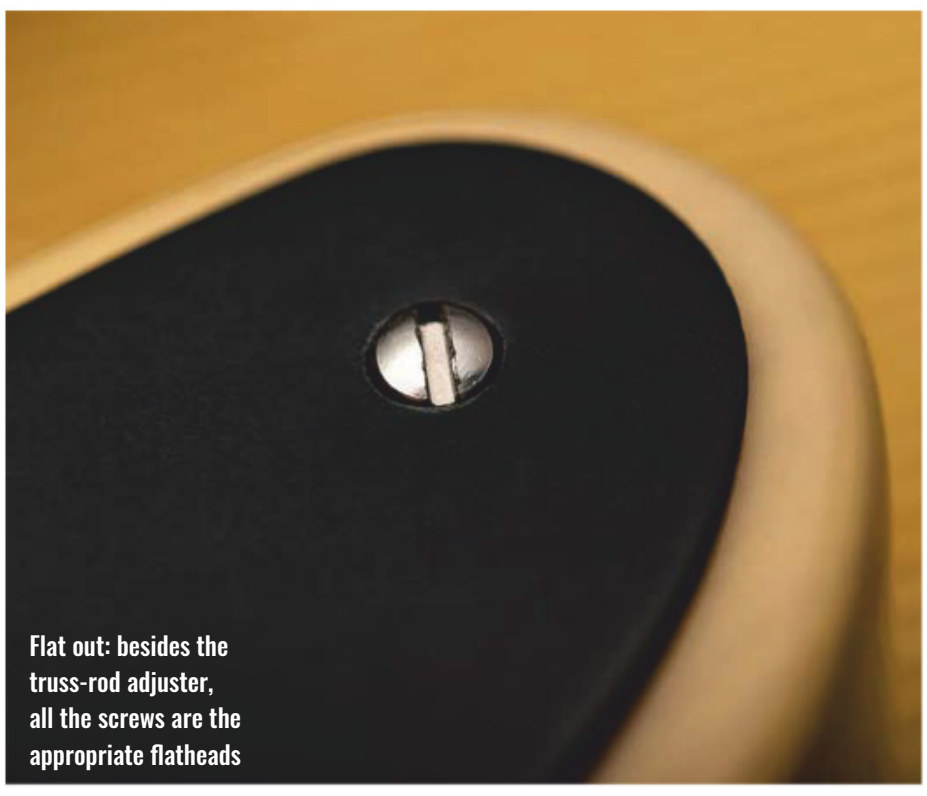
The fundamental building blocks are there but they differ greatly from the 1950 Broadcaster. That tipped the scales at 9.63lb but our review guitar weighs under 8lb. Nacho Banos' *The Blackguard* book reveals that early Fender guitars varied widely in weight – we prefer the lighter versions.

The vintage Broadcaster's neck had the finest 1950s Fender profile we've ever encountered, with Tadeo Gomez producing a piece of soft V sculpture that may be the most comfortable neck imaginable. The 70th Anniversary neck feels different but its profile – more of a deep C than the U described in the official specifications – is a lot like the vintage 1952 Telecaster we featured in these pages earlier this year.

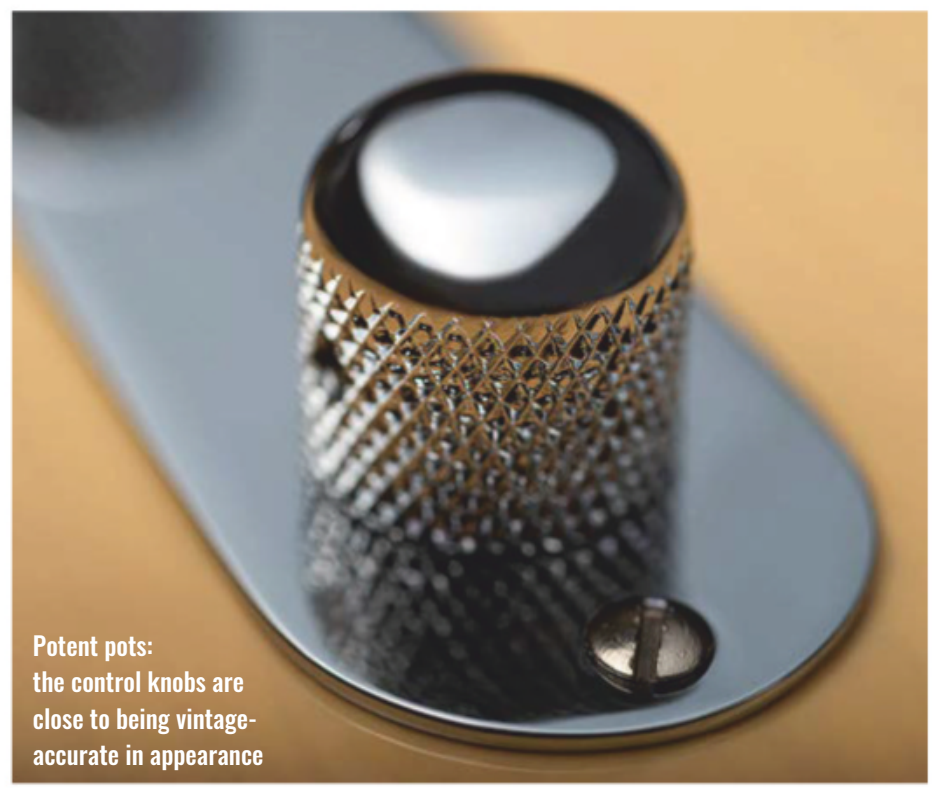
Crosshead screws didn't begin appearing on Fenders until 1951 and the transition wasn't complete until 1953, so this 70th Anniversary model has the appropriate flathead screws – all besides the truss-rod adjuster. We're pretty impressed with the accuracy of the control knobs too.



Mod cons: the brass saddles are period-correct so have no intonation compensation



Flat out: besides the truss-rod adjuster, all the screws are the appropriate flatheads



Potent pots: the control knobs are close to being vintage-accurate in appearance

Having a genuine 1954 set on hand with which to compare them, if they were just a touch flatter on the top they'd be perfect.

One of the most charming aspects of early Fenders is the inventive way the company used the materials available to it at the time. The iconic black 'guards are a case in point, and they were cut from the same vulcanised fibreboard material that was used to make Fender's amplifier eyelet boards. Fender sprayed the pickguards with nitrocellulose and polished them up, and most have held up pretty well over the years. The Anniversary model's scratchplate is described as 'one-ply black phenolic', which is more than close enough.

Fender's approach to the control configuration is not vintage-correct for any Broadcaster or Telecaster up until 1967. But few modern players will complain about the three-way blade pickup selector's bridge/bridge and neck/neck options and simple master volume and tone control arrangement. Under the hood, there's one of Fender's fancy paper-in-oil tone capacitors too, along with a set of Custom Shop Designed '50-'51 Blackguard pickups.

Despite having a single line of script, the vintage-style tuners are welcome, and we're impressed by the way the back corner of the headstock is rounded over next to the low E tuner. The round string retainer and dramatic curve behind the nut are indicative of attention to detail too, but the period-correct trio of brass saddles down at the bridge end might divide opinions as they are not slanted or milled for the intonation accuracy many of us have come to expect from modern Telecaster hardware. If you think it could be an issue, don't let this put you off – aftermarket alternatives are cheap and easy to source and install.

Fender is being generous with the tweed case's accoutrements. In the pocket, you'll find a vintage-style brown leather strap, an 'ashtray' bridge cover and a guitar cable that looks like it belongs in the early 1950s. Should you want to switch this guitar from 'modern' to 'vintage blend' wiring, then reach for the manila envelope that contains Fender's supplied 'wiring kit', which is actually just a 15k carbon composite resistor and wiring diagram. Having tried it with the vintage Broadcaster, we feel that the blend circuit is more of historical than practical interest and would opt for modern wiring every time.

Back in black: the neck pickup has clarity and a jazzy smoothness

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,009 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Ash body, one-piece maple neck with 7.25" radius, 21 vintage tall frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Chrome-plated steel bridge with three brass saddles, vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Custom Shop Designed '50-'51 Blackguard single-coil pickups, master volume and master tone, 3-way blade pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.7mm at nut, 51.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.6mm at first fret, 25.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.6mm at nut, 54.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.83lb/3.55kg
FINISH Blackguard Blonde gloss nitrocellulose
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

IN USE

With its relatively light body, full but not unwieldy neck and rolled fingerboard edges, we feel right at home with this 70th Anniversary model. Following a quick intonation adjustment and after raising the top E string slightly to cure choke out, we discover a lively and resonant Blackguard that tunes up smoothly and is easy to play.

This writer's own Blackguard replica is equipped with a genuine 1954 Fender lap steel pickup in the bridge position, and while it just edges the Custom Shop Designed unit for body and chime, the modern version is very much in the right ballpark. Some may even prefer its wiry bite to the lap steel pickup's thicker quackiness.

We love a good Tele neck pickup and our review guitar has one of the good ones – which isn't the same as saying it sounds Strat-like. This example is full and clear but has the jazzier smoothness in the upper mids that gives this type of pickup its distinctive tone. It also balances very well with the bridge to produce a classic phasey jangle and all three positions feel very dynamic and responsive.

The nitro here is thick and shiny so doesn't feel as different to a really good poly finish as you might expect – for a more vintage feel, check out the Custom Shop's Limited Edition 70th Anniversary Broadcaster, available with four levels of ageing from £3,549 – but this is a very likeable and sympathetically updated tribute to a Fender icon. With production of the anniversary models set to cease at the end of 2020, if you like what you see, act fast.

8/10 **Rather than being an exact replica, this Anniversary model stays true to the spirit of the original while broadening its appeal**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Suhr Classic T **£2,599**
LSL T-Bone **£2,499**
Maybach Teleman T54 **£1,469**

Work the angles: Echopark combines a shallower-than-vintage headstock angle with a clever taper

Got wood: the unbound pau ferro 'board combines with a chunky Khaya mahogany neck

ECHOPARK

DT SERIES THE 59

WORDS HUW PRICE

Now built in the heart of Motor City, Echopark guitars continue to make waves. This stripped-down rock 'n' roll machine certainly looks the part, but how does it sound?

Though Gabriel Currie's involvement with Gibson's Authorised Partnership Program seems to have stalled, his Echopark guitar brand continues to attract big-name players. Rock star guitars tend to come with rock star prices but, since relocating to Detroit from LA in 2017, Currie has expressed a desire to focus on more affordable US-made instruments.

The new Echopark DT Series models are still priced squarely in the custom shop and boutique bracket but they are certainly far more accessible than Currie's Case Study one-offs and Handcrafted Series models. They might not be as fancy, nor as extravagantly appointed, but there are still few compromises when it comes to the materials, hardware and electronics.

The 59 is an all-mahogany build with a set neck and an unbound pau ferro fretboard. Khaya mahogany – another term for African mahogany – is the timber of choice, and it's light in weight with a pleasing if unremarkable grain pattern. Pau ferro can vary in shade but this fretboard is at the darker end of the spectrum, with long and straight grain lines indicating that the board was cut on the quarter.

Since our review guitar corresponds so closely with a specific classic guitar design, its headstock may initially appear disconcerting. An angle of 17 degrees was standard on Gibsons throughout the 1950s but it's a well-known weak point. The Kalamazoo company subsequently lowered the angle to 14 degrees in the mid-1960s to lessen the chances of headstock breaks.

Echopark's headstock angle appears even shallower. In theory, this could result in an insufficient break angle for the strings as they pass over the nut. However, Currie's ingenious solution is to taper the headstock thickness from the front. It's more than 4mm thinner at the end, which ensures a workable angle while maintaining thickness around the nut area for maximum strength.

A silkscreened gold logo and an engraved single-ply plastic truss-rod cover enhance the peghead. Like the neck and body, it's covered in checking lines – it isn't the best faux-ageing we've seen but it's pretty good. Judging by the tiny chips and bumps along some of the lines, we're confident that some, if not all, were done using razor blades rather than thermal shock. Some also appear to be augmented with a darker stain.

As expected, the controls are neatly hand-wired, with CTS pots and a Switchcraft switch. The pickups are made by Arcane in California, and though both are PAF-sized, here we have a PAF-type at the bridge and a Silver Coil in the neck.

Echopark's humbucker specs tick all the boxes for a vintage-correct repro, with a DC resistance of 8.4k. Then again, the same can be said for most high-end PAF replicas but it's no guarantee that they'll actually sound like the real deal. We'll assess that later.

The Silver Coil is more unusual. It is described by Echopark as a "true replication of the legendary 1965 Gold Foil pickups found in Teisco", and features American ceramic bar magnets, a steel baseplate and light wax potting. Its DC resistance reads about 7.4k. Time to plug in.

IN USE

With its lightness, balance and grippy neck, The 59 feels almost effortless to play. The unplugged tone is airy, chiming and has naturally long sustain but it's not quite as deep or full as the single-cut 1956 Les Paul Special that we have on hand to compare.

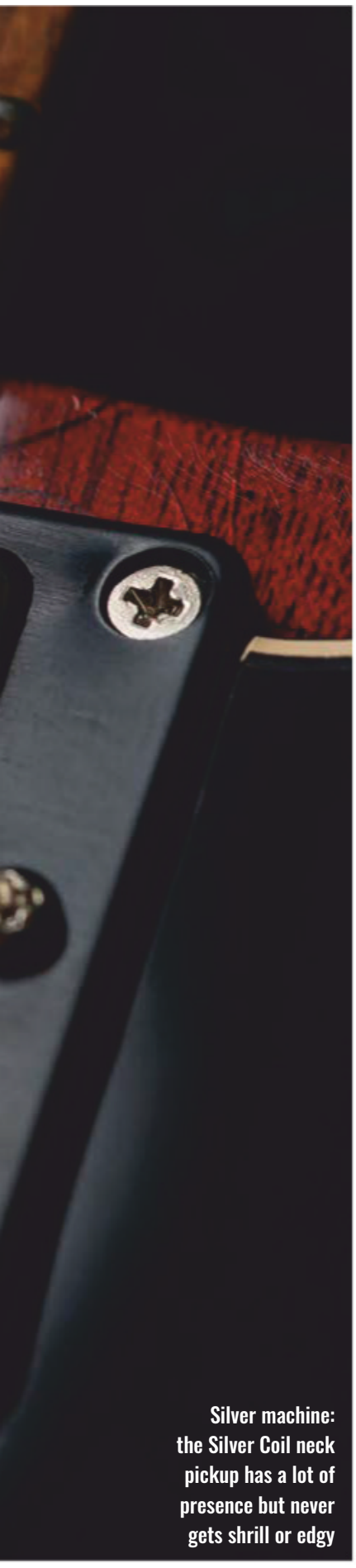
The bridge setting has familiar PAF-like qualities, with clarity, cocked-wah quack and unforced upper mids. It also captures detail impressively and cleans up well for jangle and country-style tones.

This is one of those pickup combinations in which the neck unit is as bright, if not brighter, than the bridge. The Silver Coil is a remarkable pickup, clear and with ample presence but never shrill. It also achieves that elusive balance of transparency and power, and easily holds its own with the humbucker.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,899 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Khaya mahogany body and one-piece set neck, pau ferro fretboard, 22 Jescar 9055 frets, bone nut
HARDWARE Wraparound bridge, vintage-style 3-on-a-plate tuners
ELECTRONICS Arcane PAF-style humbucker (bridge) and Silver Coil (neck) pickups, master volume and master tone controls, 3-way pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.625"/625mm
NECK WIDTH 42.6mm at nut, 51.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.9mm at first fret, 26.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.4mm at nut, 50.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 6.88lb/3.12kg
FINISH Aged Cherry gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT coda-music.com, echoparkinstruments.com

Guitars with this sort of build often hand everything to you on a plate – entrée, main course and desert simultaneously. There's a lot to savour but you get it all at once rather than layers of complexity and subtle tonal flavours that reveal themselves gradually.



Silver machine: the Silver Coil neck pickup has a lot of presence but never gets shrill or edgy

Mix and match: old-school oversized control knobs contribute to The 59's retro vibe

That's a wrap: the wrapover tailpiece and light Khaya mahogany body combine to deliver sustain and harmonics aplenty

It's a rock 'n' roll thing, and there's nothing wrong with that.

There are details that slightly concern us though. Four of the tuner bushings sit proud of the headstock's post holes, the nut corners are square and sharp, and there's a large chip on the edge of the volume control knob – although perhaps we can chalk the latter up to relic'ing.

We also wish that the bridge and tuners were aged to match the hardware and finish, and find the pickguard a little crude thanks to its rough and irregular rollover that stands in here for the traditional angled bevel. Some will view this as an example of handmade charm but failing to point it out would be unfair to all those guitar builders who strive for perfection when it comes to fine details.

Fortunately, it's far harder to find fault with The 59's tone and playability. You should steer clear if fat necks aren't your thing but we love them and feel that a guitar like this would be all wrong without one. The profile is perhaps not as refined as some vintage-style Gibson necks – or indeed vintage ones – but it's a vibey and comfortable deep U that actually feels much more 1958 than '59.

We long ago concluded that a lightweight mahogany body with a wraptail is about as close to a sure thing as you can get when it comes to electric guitar making. This setup is practically a guarantee of vibrancy, sustain and lively harmonics. That said, the pickups still need to pull their weight and do the guitar justice – and thankfully these units are outstanding.

High-quality materials and tone are a given at this price point and the DT Series 59 doesn't disappoint. But competition is stiff and, with Echopark, you're buying into the slightly rough and ready rock 'n' roll vibe too. It won't be suited to everybody but we're confident this guitar won't be hanging on the wall at Coda Music for very long. G

8/10 **With its lightweight mahogany body, wrapover tailpiece and boutique pickups, The 59 echoes the past while bringing something new to the table**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Patrick James Eggle Guitars Macon Junior **£2,895**
Gibson Custom 1960 Les Paul Special Double Cut Reissue **£2,999**
Ivison Guitars Spitfire **£3,495**

VOLUME
TONE

CHARVEL
PRO-MOD DK22 SSS 2PT CM

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

This highly evolved rock machine may be built for speed but it has plenty to offer blues and funk players too

The histories of the Charvel and Jackson brands have been entwined ever since Grover Jackson walked into Wayne Charvel's workshop in the late 1970s, but both brands have been part of the Fender family since 2002. The DK in this snappily titled instrument's moniker stands for Dinky – originally a Jackson design, the scaled-down Superstrat concept has become a staple of the Charvel catalogue in recent years too.

Part of Charvel's Mexican-made Pro-Mod range, this 22-fret solidbody was launched at the NAMM show in January. Despite its SSS designation, the pickup closest to the bridge is a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails humbucker, while 2PT refers to the neatly recessed two-point Gotoh vibrato, and CM denotes that the model has a 'caramelised' maple neck. It certainly sounds tastier than 'torrefied', 'baked' and 'roasted' but it essentially means the same thing – the neck has been thermally treated for improved resonance and stability, just like the Vikings did with the timber they used for longships back in the day.

The satin Electric Blue finish is striking but, married with the matte parchment plastics, it isn't too flash. Overall, the DK22 has a sleek and stripped-down vibe that, despite its shred credentials, wouldn't look out of place in many musical contexts.

The body is designed to provide maximum comfort and access, and includes a generous belly/ribcage contour, a softened heel, and a plunging scallop at the rear of the treble cutaway. As you might expect, the latter facilitates unfettered access to the higher reaches of the fretboard.

IN USE

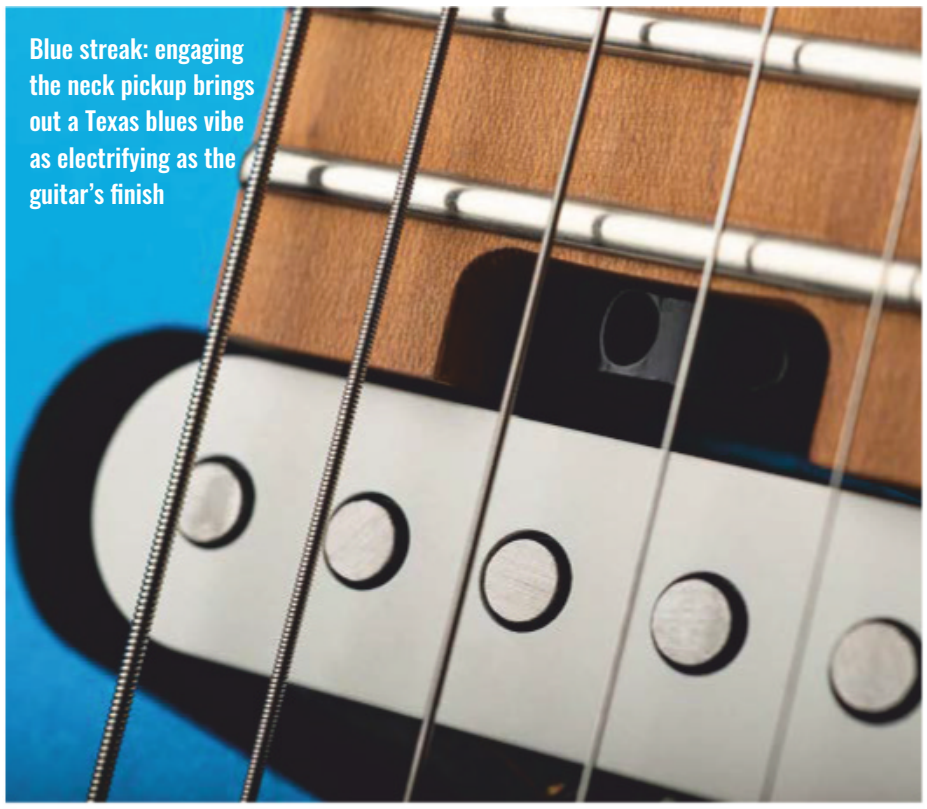
The graphite-reinforced neck is a slim D with inviting rolled fingerboard edges. Its shoulders provide support for more technical playing styles, while the 12 to 16-inch compound radius guarantees a choke-free platform for the largest string bends we can muster.

KEY FEATURES

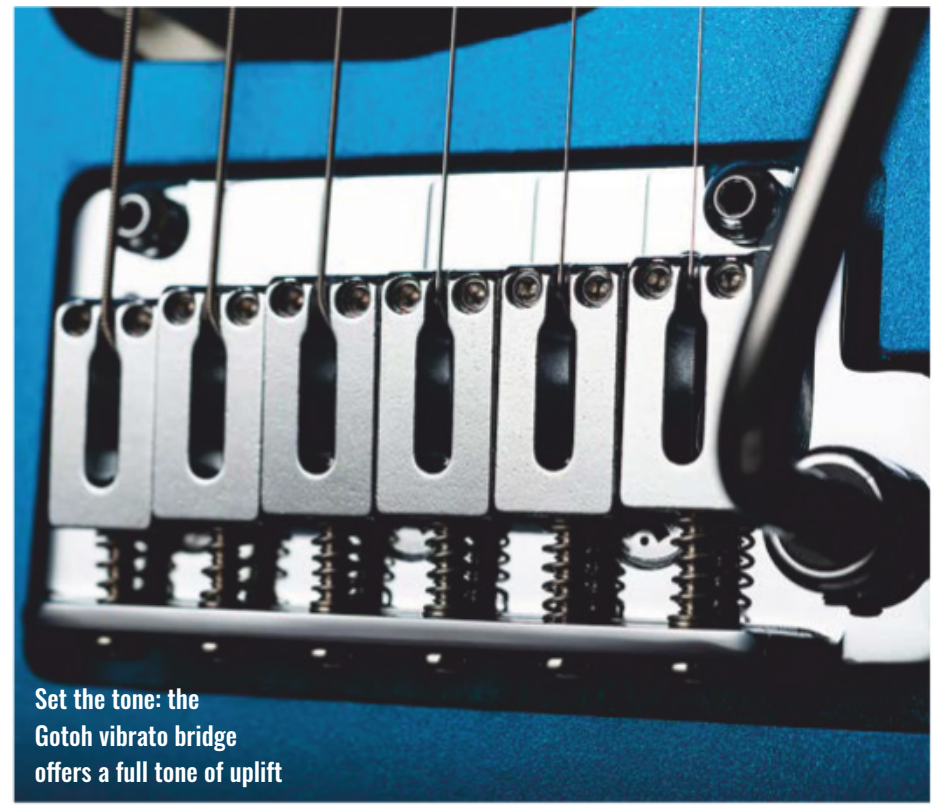
PRICE £1,009
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on graphite-reinforced caramelised maple neck with hand-rubbed satin urethane finish, 12-16" radius caramelised maple fingerboard, pearloid dot inlays, Luminlay side dots, 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Charvel die-cast locking tuners, Gotoh Custom 510 two-point vibrato bridge
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan Custom Hot Rails Strat SHR-1B humbucker (bridge), Flat Strat SSL-6 single-coil (middle), Flat Strat SSL-6 RWRP single-coil (neck), 5-way blade pickup selector, 500k EVH Bourns low-friction volume control and no-load tone control
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19.7mm at 1st fret, 22.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.9mm at bridge, 36.7mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.2kg/7lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Electric Blue satin (as reviewed), Pharaoh's Gold satin, Gloss Black
CONTACT charvel.com

The input jack socket comes in a Strat-style housing, and although its rear-mounted position takes some getting used to, it's angled to guide your cable safely up and over your strap, or into a wireless pack.

You might think you know what to expect from a three-pickup guitar with a five-way switch but think again: here, position one is the bridge pickup in full humbucking mode; position two the inner coil of the bridge



Blue streak: engaging the neck pickup brings out a Texas blues vibe as electrifying as the guitar's finish



Set the tone: the Gotoh vibrato bridge offers a full tone of uplift

On the rails: the Seymour Duncan Custom Hot Rails bridge pickup has real bite

pickup and the middle unit; position three is a Tele-style pairing of the bridge pickup's outer coil and the neck pickup; position four the middle and neck; and position five the neck pickup in splendid isolation.

Through a souped-up Plexi, the famous brown sound is on tap imeediately, enhanced by a dollop of midrange honk. The bridge pickup has an aggressive snarl that's slightly softened by its reverse angle but the no-load tone control ensures that there's still plenty of bite.

Through a cleaner channel, there's a playful but powerful snap and brilliance that's reminiscent of Guthrie Govan's tone when he explores funky clean territory. It's enormous fun hearing how venomous we can make even innocuous chord shapes sound, while engaging the neck pickup even musters a Texas blues vibe as the amp is pushed into break-up. All the while, unless you are seriously abusing the whammy bar, the Gotoh 510 proves capable and reliable, with the body recess allowing a full tone of smooth uplift.

Sweet spot: the Luminlay side dots provide a useful visual reference on dark stages

While it certainly excels in balls-to-the-wall rock territory and is terrific fun to play, the DK22 can deliver tones for all occasions, including some exceptionally dynamic clean sounds. For the price, it'd be nice if there was a gigbag was thrown in, but the DK22's price-performance ratio makes it a tempting proposition indeed. **G**

9/10 **Looking for a relatively affordable high-performance electric that's versatile and built for the road? This is it**

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Blacks

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

BLACKSTAR
JJN-20R MKII JARED JAMES NICHOLS SIGNATURE COMBO

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Fancy a shot of Bluespower? This affordable signature amp from Blackstar is ready to rock

The latest collaboration between Blackstar and blues-rock force of nature Jared James Nichols is a 1x12 combo version of his EL84-powered signature amplifier. Although Nichols has toured the world with Blackstar at his back, this combo comes loaded with a few features that are home practice and recording-friendly too.

There's no denying that this is an aesthetically pleasing box. From the racing-green tolex to the tan basketweave grille cloth and cream chickenhead knobs, it has a boutique vibe reminiscent of Rivera and early Boogie. But you will have to be particularly careful when loading this unit and out of venues and rehearsal rooms; it doesn't come with corner protectors.

While ostensibly a twin channel amp, the JJN-20R MkII features two distinct voicings for both clean and overdrive channels, offering the player four footswitchable voices, with accents from both sides of the Atlantic. The clean channel is relatively basic, with tone and volume controls and a voice switch. In contrast, the 'Bluespower' overdrive channel boasts a full complement of controls, with gain, volume, three-band EQ, voice switch and Blackstar's patented ISF control. There's a master reverb, master volume and a power reduction switch too, which takes the amp from 20 watts to down to two.

Jared James Nichols is renowned for his expressive fingers-only style of lead playing, which usually involves P-90 pickups and extensive use of his guitar's volume and tone controls. With that in mind, it's time to plug in a Les Paul Junior, fling our pick into the bin and see what this amp can do.

Go for a drive: the Bluespower overdrive channel is where you'll find dirt aplenty

Amp it up: the JJN-20R MkII boasts one ECC83 preamp and two EL84 power tubes

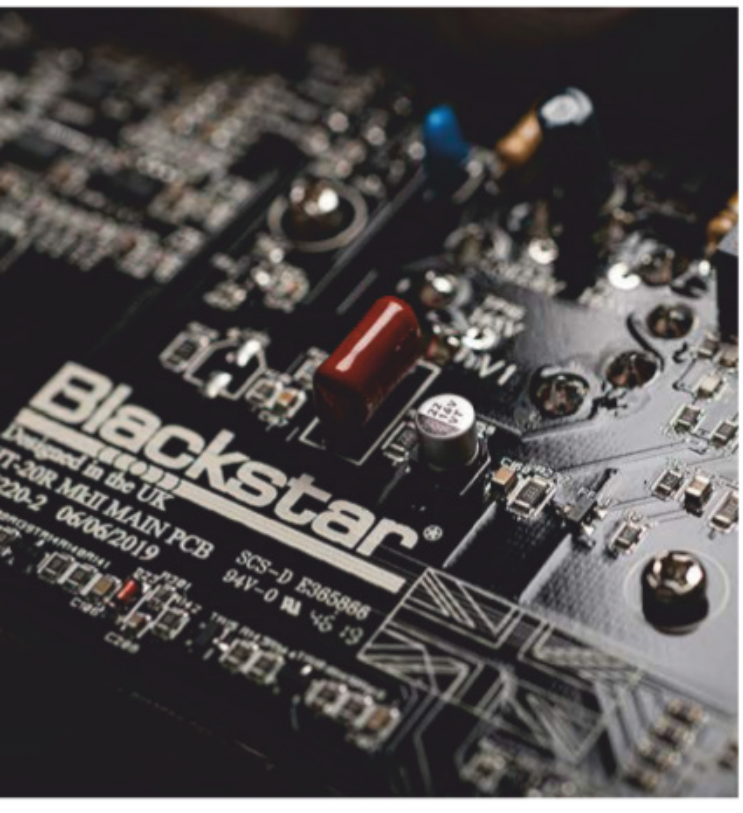
IN USE

We begin by plugging into the single input with the clean channel engaged and all knobs pointing north, and are greeted by an open Fender-style voice that sounds significantly bigger than this amp's 1x12 configuration might suggest. The bass response is particularly impressive, and the trebles shine as you dial in the reverb. There's only one 'verb voice but it's versatile and atmospheric, though it does stop short of a full surf 'drip'.

Switching to the British clean voice delivers all the top-end chime and grit you'd associate with a good Vox circuit. It's more like the spikier voice of an AC15 than the velveteen sheen of an AC30, and it's a terrifically engaging sound. We find that it doesn't take much to push it towards the grittier end of the spectrum – all it needs is for us to vary our right-hand attack and it could almost work as another gain stage between the super-cleans and the overdrives to come.

If you've ever heard Jared James Nichols in flow, you'll expect the drive tones to be the headline act here, and it's in the overdriven textures that this fiery combo truly shines. Switching to the 'classic' overdrive channel voicing unleashes a hooligan grunt that just begs for a palm-muted rhythm approach. It's a forceful old-school rock sound that isn't overly aggressive but packs a punch reminiscent of Leslie West's Marshall rhythm tones. Cranking the gain further takes us into Cream-era Clapton-style heroism,

Start your engines: racing green makes sense for an amp with this much raw power



which encourages us to work the guitar's tone control mid-lick for expressive, almost vocal lead tones.

Blackstar's ISF functionality is a popular and useful feature that crops up throughout the catalogue, and here it allows you to find hidden sonic treasures, with both overdrive voicings possessing their own sweet spots. Overdrive voice two is inspired by the high-gain tones on Blackstar's HT Venue MkII amps and it's here where things really begin to get cooking.

THE MAN HIMSELF

We spoke to Jared James Nichols to get the skinny on his new signature combo and the R&D behind it

When we caught up with Jared earlier this year, it's fair to say he was excited. "Dude, I have to say, when I first got this amp I was blown away by the look," he told us. "The head and cab have their own vibe but this is just gorgeous. It does not sound like a single speaker either!

"I was on tour with LA Guns when I visited the Blackstar factory in Northampton. They just had this whiteboard with JJN-20 written on it. It was a blank canvas! We went through speakers and voicing in massive detail, especially on the second channel – for me, it comes down to the mids, and I auditioned about 10 different speakers. I'm not going to claim that I know everything about speakers but that day changed my life. It was a real education. We tried Blues, Greenbacks but the G12T-75 that's in the combo – it's expensive but I just said, 'Make it work, bro – that sounds fucking awesome!' And they did!

"Last year I was touring with the head and a 4x12 cab doing big-boy stuff. I love the head. I put it in a Pelican case and toured all over the world. I played the shit out of it every single day and it never had any problems. This combo has everything that I love about that setup.

"It's a basic amp that was designed to do a job and it does it very well. There are no gimmicks but I really like the 20-2W switch. I've been doing a lot of livestreams for Gibson and Epiphone and it works so well for that too. I'm the most archaic guitarist in the world but I've been using the USB-out for livestreams – this does everything I need.

"Under the lights, the racing green looks great. All my favourite shit came from the UK so it's a tribute to that. It's a nice representation of the tones I love but it does so much more."

Full voice: the two-button footswitch offers access to a total of four voices

Power play: the variable power switch means this green machine can scream at home volumes too

With a lead voice reminiscent of an old Boogie with a pinch of Soldano, the pre-bends, doublestops and wide vibrato employed with such aplomb by Mr Nichols are immediately brought to life. At full chat, the sound remains rich and expressive with no low-end flatulence or waspish trebles. Perhaps even more impressive is the way the JJN-20R MkII responds immediately to changes in picking-hand attack and tiny adjustments to volume and tone. It's an inspiring sound, deftly walking that fine line between raw blues and smart boutique tones, and it encourages you to grab onto the expensive notes and make them scream.

We connect to a MacBook Pro via the amp's USB-out and, going into Logic, the resulting direct clean and overdrive textures sit beautifully well in our pre-recorded mix. In fact, we're so inspired that we re-record our original rhythm tracks with the Blackstar, as it sounds demonstrably better than the plug-in amp simulations we'd used initially.

Those same searing tones that the amp produces at 20 watts are readily accessible at bedroom levels when you knock the power down to two watts, too. There's also a robust effects loop for your pedals – even if JJN himself keeps it dangerously real with just a Klon Centaur – but if you want an amplifier festooned with digital effects, keep looking.

This is not an amp for all seasons, a dentist-blues Dumble pretender or a personality-free reissue. Instead, Blackstar and Jared James Nichols have come up with one of the most engaging amps for bare-ass rock 'n' roll that we've encountered in this price bracket.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £699 (inc two-button footswitch)
DESCRIPTION 2-channel 1x12 valve combo, made in China
POWER RATING 20W switchable to 2W
VALVES 1x ECC83 preamp, 2x EL84 power amp
CONTROL PANEL Input, clean volume, voice and tone, Bluespower channel selector, overdrive gain, voice, volume, bass, middle, treble, ISF, reverb level, master volume, 20/2W power-mode switch
REAR PANEL USB audio, footswitch, effects send, return and level, MP3/line-in, Kensington Lock, emulated XLR DI and jack line/phones outputs with switchable 1x12 or 4x12 cab sim, 3x speaker outputs (1x16, 1x8 or 2x16 ohms)
SPEAKER 1x 12-inch Celestion G12T-75
DIMENSIONS 513 x 487 x 270mm
WEIGHT 15.9kg/35lb
CONTACT blackstaramps.com

9/10 **Classic tube-driven tones with modern connectivity and power reduction but no unnecessary frills**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS Sonzera 20 Combo **£658**
Marshall SV20C Studio Vintage SV20C **£799**
Friedman Runt 20 Combo **£1,429**

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Guitarist

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BOOST
GAIN
CYCLE

That's my boy: top-mounted jacks make this an efficient and space-saving unit

JACKSON AUDIO
GOLDEN BOY

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $299 US
DESCRIPTION Overdrive and boost pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Volume, boost, gain, bass, middle, treble
FEATURES Independent footswitches for drive and boost, 4x overdrive diode-clipping modes, 4x MOSFET boost modes, gain-cycle switching, 3-band active EQ, MIDI control, 9V-DC centre-negative power only
DIMENSIONS 124 x 68 x 65mm
CONTACT jackson.audio, reverb.com

Named after the Georges Gardet statue atop the legislative building in Joey Landreth's hometown of Manitoba, Canada, this collaboration between the slide supremo and Jackson Audio promises to set a new gold standard for transparent overdrive

Joey Landreth is one of the most admired guitar stars of the Instagram age, and this gleaming stompbox is the result of a collaboration between the Canadian guitarist and Texas-based pedal brand Jackson Audio, an offshoot of Jackson Ampworks.

Despite residing in a compact housing with top-mounted jacks to save on pedalboard real estate, the unit features two footswitches that provide access to four flavours of overdrive clipping diodes and MOSFET boost, respectively. Press the switch to toggle drive or boost on or off, hold it down for more than one second to access the program mode, then tap to cycle through the presets, each of which is denoted by a different LED colour. Hold it down again to exit program mode and select the one you want to use. Simple.

Versatility is the theme here. You also get a three-band Baxandall-style EQ with 12dB boost/cut per control, extensive MIDI control and innovative gain-cycle functionality, which ramps up the gain in 25 per cent increments up to a maximum of 100 per cent when you press both footswitches simultaneously.

The boost is in its own true-bypass loop so it can be used independently of the drive circuit, or stacked. There's even an Easter egg in the form of an internal jumper switch that toggles between silent boost-knob rotation, and a mode that crackles when you turn the knob as if it were an old-school MOSFET circuit, and offers five per cent more gain at the highest setting.

IN USE

While not as revered as the Tube Screamer and Klon, the original early 1990s Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal deserves its place in the overdrive hall of fame. The circuit has provided the inspiration for some of the most lauded boutique units of recent times, not least the Analog Man King Of Tone and, indeed, the Jackson Audio Golden Boy.

BEFORE THE GOLD RUSH

Joey Landreth on the birth of the Golden Boy

"I got to know Jackson Audio through their Prism pedal," says Landreth when we quiz him about the R&D behind this hugely impressive overdrive pedal.

"Brad [Jackson] mentioned to me that he was working on a compressor called the Bloom and asked if I had any ideas for it. We got to know each other over the course of that project and I went to Nashville to shoot some videos for the launch. They also made their Broken Arrow overdrive pedal around the same time and gave me one of those to try as well.

"The Broken Arrow is Brad's version of a Tube Screamer-style circuit but with switchable-diode clipping options and an integrated MOSFET boost. I loved everything about the pedal, especially the EQ and the innovative control functions, the gain cycling and the simple yet clever switching system. But tone-wise, I've never been a huge Tube Screamer guy.

"After touring with it on my board for a few months, I approached Brad with the idea of taking that same platform but incorporating something like the old Bluesbreaker-style circuit instead of the Tube Screamer's. We took a look at what some of the popular BB-inspired pedals were doing differently and tried to represent them tonally while maintaining our own sound. I really think it does that!

"Even if I wasn't associated with this pedal, I'd be using it. It just has *that* sound. It captures all my favourite BB-inspired tones and the MIDI integration to control the switching is a huge bonus live. It's a must-have for the working guitar player."

© Robin Little / Getty Images

Light entertainment: two LEDs guide you through the preset-selection process

Shining example: if this is the shape of artist collaborations to come, we'd like to see more

Though it's often referred to as a 'transparent' overdrive, the Bluesbreaker infuses your tone with a mid-rich touch-sensitive overdrive that's subtle at lower gain levels and dripping with harmonics when wound up. The Golden Boy resides in this ballpark too and, compared to an original 1990s Bluesbreaker and an Analog Man King Of Tone, it more than delivers.

In the blue drive mode, the symmetrical clipping of four silicon diodes nails our favourite KOT tones, creating natural, uncompressed break-up with blooming sustain that works beautifully with our Strat and black-panel Fender. Along with the variable array of boost options and the comprehensive active EQ, if this was all the pedal did, we'd be happy. But there's more.

Wind up the gain with a Les Paul for seriously rich Beano Album-style tones but with a significantly wider gain range, volume and EQ flexibility than the original Marshall pedal. Switch to green mode and two symmetrical clipping diodes give you the compression, mid hump and drive of, you guessed it, a top-notch Tube Screamer.

Coupled with a P-90 Goldtop, the asymmetric clipping of the magenta mode is fantastic for everything from slide work to Americana rhythm parts that sit beautifully in a mix. In a further revelation, the amber mode uses a pair of red LEDs to deliver a seriously punchy high-gain, high-headroom 1990s heavy rock tone.

Jackson and Joey Landreth have really struck gold with this pedal, and it has none of the consistency and reliability issues that can plague vintage pedals after decades underfoot. Copping the sounds of some of the stompbox overdrive greats is a triumph, sure, but the crowning glory here is the vast array of versatile gain tones and features. The Golden Boy might even make two or three of the pedals currently on your board redundant.

9/10 **A potential King Of Tone killer with no waiting list and greater versatility**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Chase Bliss Audio Brothers **£349**
Strymon Sunset **£249**
Analog Man King of Tone **$265**

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VOLUME
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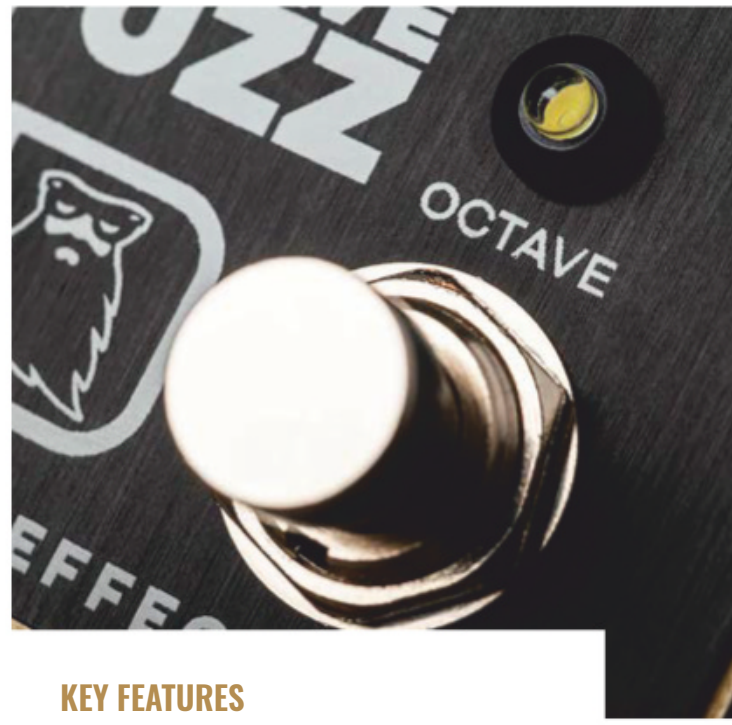
OCTAVE
TREBLE
BASS
FUZZ
HONEY BADGER
BYPASS
OCTAVE FUZZ
OCTAVE
REDBEARD EFFECTS

Divide and conquer: the Honey Badger lets you blend between one and two octaves down for maximum chaos



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £199
DESCRIPTION Octave-down fuzz pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Volume, octave divide, octave level, treble, bass, fuzz
FEATURES True bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 126 x 70 x 60mm
CONTACT redbeardeffects.com

REDBEARD EFFECTS

HONEY BADGER OCTAVE FUZZ

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The second offering from the collaboration between Skindred guitarist Mikey Demus and pedal guru Adrian Thorpe promises assorted flavours of slavering doom

There are two good reasons to be afraid of this pedal. Firstly, despite what may seem like a cutesy name, the honey badger is in fact a python-munching predator, renowned as the most fearless beast of the Kalahari. Secondly, this unit is the sophomore effort from Redbeard Effects, whose debut stomper, the Red Mist Mk IV, was all manner of savage.

The brand has a unique pedigree: it was set up by Mikey Demus of ragga-metal legends Skindred and Adrian Thorpe of boutique stompbox company ThorpyFX. Mikey warned us last year that the second Redbeard pedal would be "pretty ludicrous" and "an extremely hazardous little box", and he wasn't kidding. This small but ferocious unit is a high-gain fuzz with two switchable and blendable down octaves.

With six knobs and two footswitches squeezed into the same compact enclosure as the Red Mist, this pedal looks to be even more ambitious than its capable predecessor. It's a smart looker, although the one-inch gap between the bypass and octave switches means engaging both at once might be easier than hitting either switch on its own, depending on the width of your shoes.

The fuzz part of the deal seems straightforward enough but the Redbeard philosophy is all about adding something extra – and, in this case, the knob to watch is in the middle of the top row. Marked 'divide', it lets you blend between one and two octaves down, and you can adjust the level of those added notes using the octave control to the right. It all sounds fairly simple, but as we'll see in a second, it isn't.

IN USE

Even with the fuzz set all the way down to zero and the octave effect switched off, this is a wild one, spitting out chords with a congested snarl that's closer to the ratty rage of a Maestro Fuzz-Tone than any of the usual fluffy-toned reference points.

The edginess gets no less pronounced as we thicken up the fuzz past the halfway point but, at about the three o'clock position, it falls away quite suddenly to leave a much smoother, almost Muff-like voice. That's a nice surprise – and between this and the two EQ controls, we've got a broad range of tone-sculpting options to play with here.

The first thing we learn when we unleash the octaves is that they're very dependent on the level of the signal going into the pedal: fed by high-output pickups or a boost pedal, the tracking is for the most part impressively tight; with lower-output pickups, it's all over the place.

That's not a criticism, though. In fact, it's kind of the point – just ask owners of the legendary MXR Blue Box. Here, on anything but the most rapid staccato playing, you can hear the low octaves jumping in and out like some sort of randomised arpeggiator before vanishing rather abruptly as each sustaining note drops below a certain (non-adjustable) threshold.

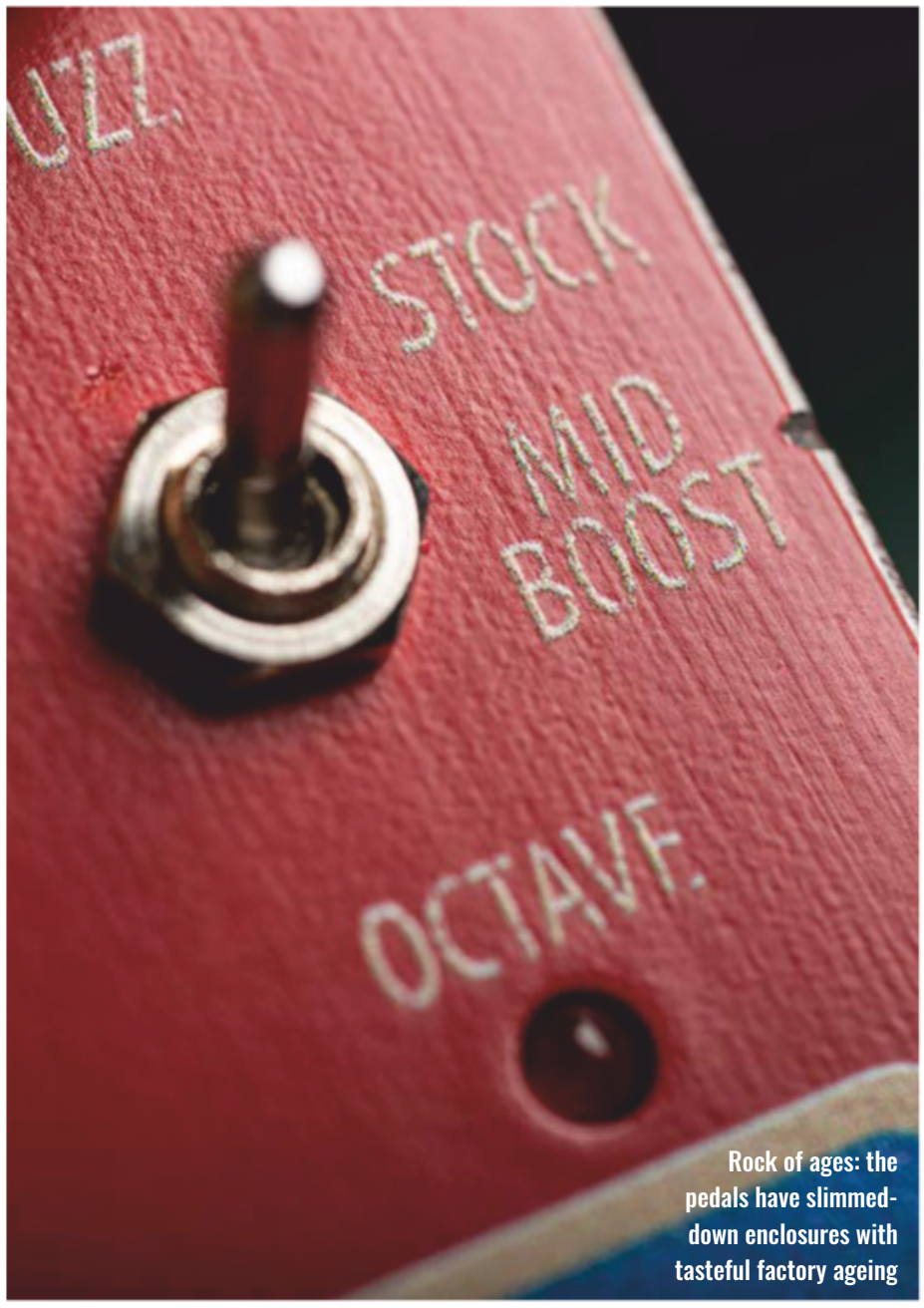
Playing full chords makes things even more barmy – at some settings a simple strum can sound like a slowed-down explosion in a saucepan factory. But if you're prepared to give yourself up to a certain degree of chaos, you'll find riding with this beast most entertaining.

8/10 **An uncompromising rock monster with seriously glitchy down-octave effects**

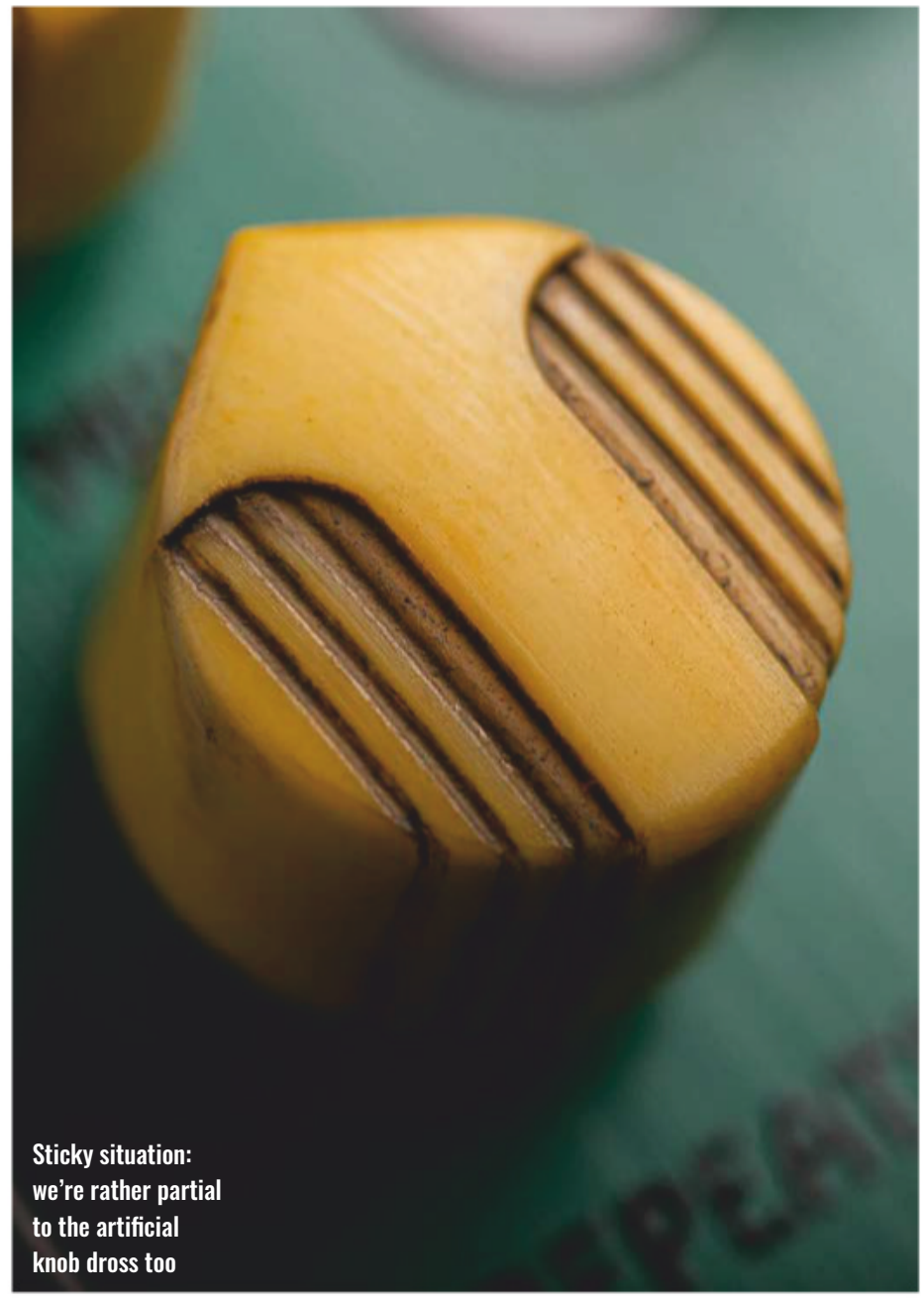
LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Catalinbread Perseus **£145**
EarthQuaker Devices Bit Commander **£195**
Beetronics Swarm **£269**

VOLUME
FUZZ
STOCK
MID BOOST
TONE
OCTAVE
3699 fUZZ™
DANELECTRO®
SPEED
REPEATS
DANELECTRO
BACK TALK™
REVERSE DELAY



Rock of ages: the pedals have slimmed-down enclosures with tasteful factory ageing



Sticky situation: we're rather partial to the artificial knob dross too

DANELECTRO
BACK TALK REVERSE DELAY & 3699 FUZZ

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Danelectro is back in the pedal game and back to doing what it does best: the weird and wonderful

There's no denying that Danelectro has upped its game of late. With an already established reputation for perfectly serviceable and affordable effects boxes, the company's ethos has now drifted back towards guitar-geek cool. Its latest offerings, the Back Talk Reverse Delay and 3699 Fuzz, hark back to key moments of strange glory in stompbox history.

In their long-discontinued original forms, both the Danelectro Back Talk and Foxx Tone Machine make for pricey and impractical additions to any player's board. In a concession to ergonomics, these reissues come in battery-free single-berth enclosures factory aged with scratches, dings and – there's no other way to put this – knob grime.

Introduced back in 1999 for what seemed like only a moment, the Back Talk Reverse Delay was one of a trifecta of 1960s-inspired Danelectro pedals that leaned heavily on the psychedelicate textures that proved so irresistible to players of the 1990s. While the world remained justifiably indifferent to the Free Speech Talk Box and showed the Sitar Swami the contempt it deserved, the Back Talk became an instant underground classic thanks to its gritty and irascible reverse delay textures.

The Foxx Tone Machine fuzz was launched in the 1970s by Danelectro owner Steve Ridinger, and the 3699 Fuzz takes its name from the last four digits of the Foxx company's old phone number, which spell out 'Foxx' on a standard telephone keypad.

Original Tone Machines were draped in sticky-backed velvet-textured felt, ideal for absorbing every particle of the stale beer and cigarette smoke ambience of 20th-century live music venues. They're known for their snarling, spitty fuzz sound and a propensity for the chaotic end of the dial, and inevitably found favour among the sort of funk and psychedelic players you'd expect to look kindly upon a velvet-wrapped fuzz pedal. Naturally, it also has an octave switch.

IN USE

The 1999 Back Talk is a flawed classic. Despite its glorious reverse delay sound, it remains a less than practical choice for most players' boards. The biggest drawbacks are the size of the enclosure itself, coupled with its awkward shape, frangible plastic knobs, and jack sockets that afford little protection from the vagaries of expressive musicianship. This has prompted many players to get their originals re-housed in sturdier enclosures. Almost telepathically, Danelectro has come correct with this reissue's compact dimensions (it stands a little taller than an EHX Nano) and rectangular stance. The metal sockets, meanwhile, inspire feelings of dependability and calm.

One of the joys of the Back Talk's design is that the controls are extremely simple, leaving a lot of the expressive potential to the player. The speed and repeat controls are self-explanatory, with the mix knob playing a pivotal role in creating a multitude of textures, from gentle reverse slapback delay to towering *Castles Made Of Sand* reverse leads and *Small Hours*-style soundscapes à la John Martyn, all with minimum effort.

Full disclosure: this reviewer owned and adored an original Back Talk pedal, and the prospect of being reunited with these rare textures is enough to encourage optimism, despite lockdown conditions inflicting on him a hairstyle also unseen since the 1990s.

Continuing the circa Y2K theme, we plug into an early Cornford Hurricane with a Telecaster, engage the true-bypass soft switch (another evolutionary upgrade from the original) and gaze at our shoes while swaying gently. Danelectro has made this loving reissue with all NOS parts and its no exaggeration to say we get a bit emotional to have such perfect, delicious backward weeblings beneath our fingers again. It's *that* sound, nailed.

Aside from the often threadbare velvet haberdashery – the original units might be the only effects pedals able to contract mange – the most challenging aspects of using an original Foxx Tone Machine on a contemporary pedalboard are, once again, the size of the unit and its side-mounted knobs. Danelectro's reimagined 3699 Fuzz corrects this maverick approach with a direct and robust tone-management system that makes sense immediately and is easy to use. Volume, fuzz and tone knobs are all present and correct, along with a mini-toggle switch that offers a choice of stock and mid-boost voices, and there's enough room between the dual footswitches to make accidental ignition of the octave function unlikely.

It becomes apparent right away that the 3699 Fuzz is no genteel Fuzz Face clone. Instead, we're confronted by a gratifying, sawtoothed shot of belligerence that harks straight back to the anarchic response of the original. It's a little bit Fuzzrite and a little bit Tone Bender, with a touch of Shin-ei Companion thrown in for good measure – and it can go from proto-punk powerchords to *Maggot Brain* wig-outs at the drop of a wide-brimmed, peacock-feathered hat.

The key with any fuzz pedal is to smack the preamp hard with the volume before you go in deep with the fuzz, and the 3699 can certainly backhand a tube combo with the best of them. The tone knob provides as much if not more scope for sonic surgery than the original ever did, going from 'wall of fur' to 'tinned mosquito' at either end of the spectrum, while the mid boost is a thoroughly nasal kick in the ribs.

Anyone contemplating using the 3699 Fuzz without ever engaging the octave switch doesn't deserve to have one. It offers a life-affirming helping of high-octave beeps, squeals and gurgles that, with the neck pickup engaged and the tone rolled off for inquisitive R2D2 interjections, reminds us that all will be well – eventually.

With this characterful brace of reimagined pedals, Danelectro has achieved something special in making prohibitively expensive and fantastically rare and expressive sounds accessible to players of all styles, without the challenges that come with using the original units. More please!

Look who's talking: Danelectro's original Back Talk first opened its mouth in 1999

What does the Foxx say: the 3699's name comes from Foxx's old telephone number

KEY FEATURES

DANELECTRO BACK TALK REVERSE DELAY
PRICE £189
DESCRIPTION Reverse delay pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Mix, speed, repeats knobs, on/off soft footswitch
FEATURES Top-mounted jacks, true bypass switching, mains power only
DIMENSIONS 112 x 59.5 x 56mm
CONTACT jhs.co.uk, danelectro.com

10/10 **A classic, if rather niche, effect – but if you're looking for a dedicated reverse delay, this has to be the one**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix Attack Decay **£110**
TC Electronic Flashback 2 **£90**
DigiTech Obscura **£107**

KEY FEATURES

DANELECTRO 3699 FUZZ
PRICE £189
DESCRIPTION Fuzz/octave pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Volume, fuzz, tone knobs, stock/mid boost mini-toggle, on/off and octave footswitches
FEATURES Top-mounted jacks, true bypass switching, mains power only
DIMENSIONS 112 x 59.5 x 56mm

9/10 **A characterful and accurate rendering of a legendary oddball fuzz, now in a much more practical housing**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Catalinbread Fuzzrite **£152**
Orange Fur Coat Fuzz **£109**
Keeley Fuzz Bender **£155**

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TEISCO

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Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £529
TYPE In-ear monitoring system, made in Germany
FEATURES Wide-band single dynamic driver, memory foam and rubber alternative ear-cushion kit, removable washable plugs
CONTACT sennheiser.com

SENNHEISER
IE 500 PRO

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Struggling to hear yourself in a band mix? Sennheiser may have a professional-level answer

During gigs, performers often have to contend with the worst sound in the venue. The combination of adverse room acoustics and muddy and aggressive onstage sound reinforcement has led many musicians to investigate in-ear monitors to help them retain detail and nuance in their playing.

Many such systems have depended on balanced armature drivers, technology adapted from the hearing aid industry. BADs are very small and often used in triple configurations to allow an individual driver to focus on a specific part of the frequency spectrum via an electronic crossover circuit. However, they are subject to phase issues, drop-outs where the frequency bands overlap, and the phenomenon of total harmonic distortion, which sees distortion levels increasing as the volume does.

German brand Sennheiser has brought 75 years of experience to bear in the production of its new range of in-ear monitors, which use a single wide-band dynamic driver to cover the entire frequency spectrum. This eliminates phasey drop-outs and offers a clean sonic image with a remarkably low distortion level of only 0.08 per cent.

Upon opening the packaging, we are greeted by an impressive array of accessories that includes including five alternative sets of washable plugs in both rubber and memory foam. There's also a small cleaning tool to help you deal with those hard-to-reach areas.

IN USE

The ideal setup for systems of this nature includes a wireless belt/strap-mounted receiver, and Sennheiser has a range to choose from. Just remember that if you're changing guitars during a set then you'll need to put these on before you strap on your instrument. Alternatively, you could use the same strap and mount the receiver there instead.

The units look good and feel extremely comfortable, and we breeze through our listening session with no fatigue or discomfort, which is remarkable given that this is a set of non-custom in-ears. In fact, with their braided cable and smokey black plastic housing, they come across more like bespoke moulded units than generic earbuds.

Determined to give the IE 500 Pros as difficult a time as possible, we set up the sort of scenarios that in-ears tend to find challenging. In a heavy band mix, we're particularly impressed by the separation of each element of the drum kit, which allows us to really lock in with the kick and snare. In-ear systems can struggle to provide sufficient detail for guitarists who also sing but with these Sennheisers we have enough clarity to help us really nail that vocal line with a mic'd acoustic running in the background too.

Finally, as a treat, we run a selection of our favourite reference tracks, including songs from Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*, Pearl Jam's *Ten*, and Rage Against The Machine's eponymous debut album. The results are spine-chilling. We can see these units excelling in contexts where the use of a high-quality near-field monitor setup is difficult – livestreaming comes immediately to mind – and they are detailed enough to serve you well in any venue. Finally, the performer can have the best sound in the house.

9/10 **A terrific alternative to onstage wedges and one of the best in-ear systems we've tried**

LIKE THESE? TRY THESE...

CMackie MP-220 **£105**
InEar StageDiver SD-3 **£459**
Shure SE846 **£795**

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THE RUNDOWN

THIS MONTH'S BEST NEW GEAR

WORDS CILLIAN BREATHNACH & DANIEL SEAH

From scaled-down siblings to stylish reincarnations, we uncover this month's most interesting new guitars, amps and effects

SQUIER PARANORMAL SERIES TORONADO
£349

1 The underrated Toronado was introduced by Fender back in 1998 and has now made its grand return as part of Squier's time-travelling Paranormal Series. Armed with a pair of humbuckers, it's more rock-ready than Fender's regular offset fare, while the hardtail bridge should mean that tuning stability stays rock solid.

TAYLOR AMERICAN DREAM AD17
£1,529

2 Taylor's newly announced American Dream series not only represents the brand's most affordable US-made acoustics but also brings the company's revolutionary V-Class bracing to a more attainable price-point than ever before. This Grand Pacific design sports a spruce top, a mahogany neck and, for the first time on a GP, ovangkol back and sides.

TC ELECTRONIC DITTO+
£99

3 TC's tiny and venerable looper has been given a serious upgrade, including a colour display that allows users to see exactly how far along they are in their loop. The new 'extend loop' feature allows you to dub longer loops over shorter ones, and auto cue helps to activate new loops at the right time, rather than relying on pushing the footswitch.

MOOER GE300 LITE
£468

5 This may be a scaled-down version of Mooer's fantastic flagship GE300 multi-effects unit but it doesn't lack much in terms of its larger sibling's feature set, incorporating more than 160 onboard effects, over 100 digital amp models, and more than 40 factory cabinet sims, as well as the brand's Tone Capture onboard IR sampler.

CORT KX300 ETCHED
£499

6 The KX300 comes loaded with EMG MG RetroActive Super 77 humbuckers, which offer a blend of traditional design and EMG's signature active approach. Let's be honest though, that's not the main draw here – with a sandblasted swamp-ash top on a mahogany body, this is certainly an eye-catching instrument.

SOLDANO SLO-30
£2,599

7 Lunchbox amps are popular way to get valve tone without upsetting the neighbours, and with live music still hugely disrupted by the pandemic, it made sense for Mike Soldano to scale down his formidable SLO-100 into a more manageable form. Happily, the SLO-30 retains most of its sibling's features, including hugely flexible controls.

MAXON APEX808
$300

4 Created by original Tube Screamer designer Susumu Tamura, the Apex808 is the fruit of three years of research during which Tamura inspected more than 100 different TS-808 variants. He concluded that the use of a rare IC chip had a significant impact on the transparency and clarity of the TS – and that's what you'll find in the Apex808.

PRS SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO
£1,349

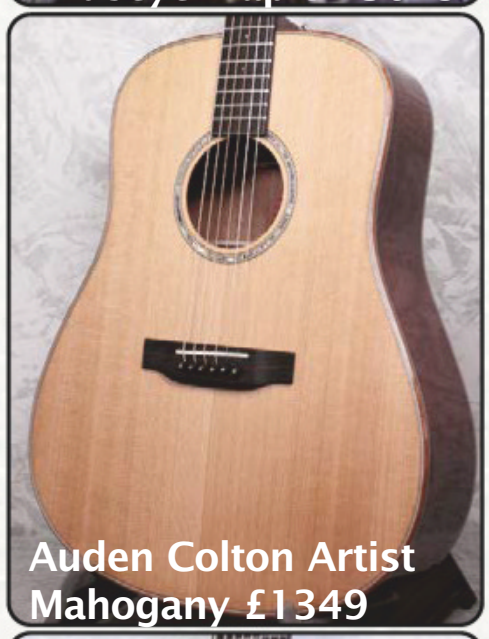
8 PRS continues to expand its more affordable SE line with instruments bristling with features that debuted in its US catalogue. Now, for the first time, it's added a piezo-loaded electric into the mix. Designed in conjunction with LR Baggs, the Hollowbody II sports a pair of 58/15 "S" humbuckers, which can be blended with acoustic-style textures from the piezo.

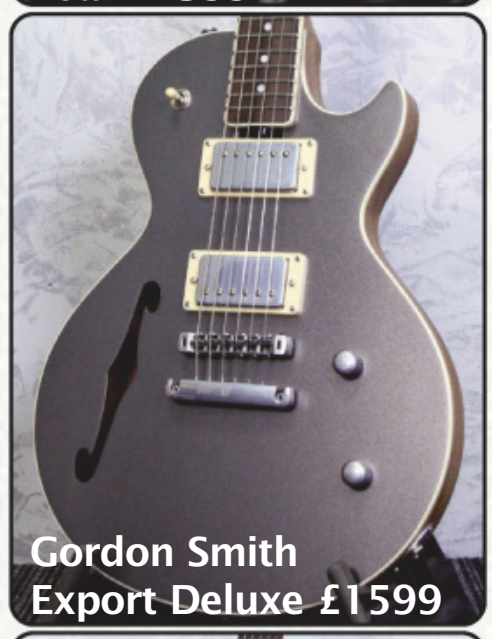
Forsyth
Est 1857

Highlights Of The Month

Atkin L- 36 Custom
Birdseye Maple £3675

Martin 000- 12E
Koa £1399


Auden Colton Artist
Mahogany £1349


Gordon Smith
Export Deluxe £1599

Ortega 8 String
RCE159- 8 £550

Guild Starfire 1
SC £499

ACOUSTICS
Main dealer for Lowden, Atkin, Brook, Sheeran, Patrick James Eggle, Martin, Faith, Auden, Seagull, Fender, Eastman, Aria, Crafter, Maton, Furch, Tanglewood

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ELECTRICS AND BASSES
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The Stellarosa was inspired by the rare, Japanese-made Stella Japonica from the 1960s

INDUSTRY INSIDER

FIDELITY GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Despite being founded in 2017, Fidelity Guitars has already made its mark on the UK music scene, with its distinctive instruments seen in the hands of Slaves, Public Service Broadcasting, The Horrors and even Dave Grohl. Founder Matt Oram looks back on the brand's rapid rise

How did you get into guitar?

"My parents tried to get me playing classical at primary school but it didn't really stick. I can still remember one particularly awful recital of *Greensleeves* above a pub in the local village, which was the final nail in the coffin. In my teens, I fell in love with the *NME* and the guitars that the artists in there were playing. There was a band called JJ72 that I loved. The frontman was Mark Greaney and he played a black-and-white Strat in the video for their song *Oxygen* and, when I saw that, that was it for me. I wanted in. My uncle also played guitar. He gave me his Hohner Marlin for my 16th birthday. It was black with a white scratchplate, just like the one from the video. I was over the moon."

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"That same Hohner was my first guinea pig. Eventually, I decided it'd look better as a Tele and chopped the horn off with a saw from the garden shed. Then I ruined it by pouring red paint over the raw wood and letting it drip down the body like it had been wounded. My next guitar was an Epiphone Riviera in tobacco sunburst. I was a lot more considered with the tinkering on that one – there wasn't an original part left once I was done with it. I don't think it sounded or played any better in the end but it was a good education in how guitars are put together."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"About two years after the point that I'd already committed to it as my it my full-time occupation. I had a career in marketing for about a decade before this and, on the face of it, things were going well. But in 2015, I started suffering with anxiety and panic attacks around public speaking and it boiled down to the fact that I was pouring all my energy into something that didn't make me happy. I came out the other side knowing that I needed to do something I genuinely cared about, so I spent a year of my spare time learning the basics of luthiery and went full-time in January 2017. If I could do it again, I'd have sought more technical advice before taking the plunge. But having no safety net forced me to focus."

Public Service Broadcasting's J Willgoose Esq with his signature model

This Stellarosa Lite in Torino Red is part of Fidelity's new Lite Series

Did you manage to get any external investment or support when you were starting out?

"Other than family members chipping in during the lean times, almost all of the funding has come from my own pocket. I sold pretty much everything I owned to start the business and keep it running, including my car and my entire guitar collection. I did manage to access a government-backed start-up loan during our second year of trading, which helped at a critical time. It forced me to put a bit more thought into business planning. It's easy to just bury your head in the sawdust and neglect that side of things until someone forces you to pause and consider what you're doing in more detail before they'll help you move forward."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"It was very much a conscious decision that the brand should come across as professional and trustworthy from day one. The website, store and social channels were up and running before we had any products. I can totally understand people sneering at how cynical and corporate that might sound but there are so many incredible luthiers in the UK and you wouldn't know half of them exist because they're invisible online. The idea of the Fidelity Guitars brand as a unified concept extends to the guitars too. Wherever possible, we're using our own hardware designs. It was important to me that we differentiate ourselves by making as much of the package as bespoke as possible at this price point. The exception to that rule is Mojo Pickups, which we use on all of the guitars and basses."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"It's the Stellarosa, which is our top-of-the-range guitar and the best example of our signature 'custom everything' approach. I owe it all to Marc at Mojo Pickups actually. He commissioned me to build him a replica of the Stella Japonica. I agreed but I asked him if I could play around with the design a little. He agreed and, through various iterations, we came up with the Stellarosa design, which is now my favourite model – and apparently our customers like it too. Laurie from Slaves picked the name for it, which is just the icing on the cake."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"I'm a massive fan of Public Service Broadcasting and we've been lucky enough to have J Willgoose Esq supporting us since the early days. In 2018, they released the *White Star Liner* EP, the title track of which was recorded using his signature Double Standard model. It was the first time one of our guitars made it onto some published music. They debuted it at a BBC festival in Belfast on the Titanic slipway with that guitar in hand, right where the ship was built. Then they went one better in 2019 and played The Royal Albert Hall as part of the BBC Proms with that same guitar, and one of our first short-scale Thundermaker basses too. But Belfast is still the most special moment for me."

What's next for Fidelity Guitars?

"Our most recent launch has been the new Lite series of guitars. They use the same body outlines and necks as our premium models but are built on a simpler solidbody platform rather than being chambered. Given that many gigging musicians became unemployed overnight when COVID-19 hit, it seemed like a good time to find a way of continuing to build high-quality boutique gear to inspire them but at a much more affordable price. Apart from that, we've got a two-pickup variation of the Stellarosa in the works, and a few iterations of our bass models, which should make their way into the product line by the end of the year." G

Find out more at fidelity-guitars.co.uk

"It's important to me that we differentiate ourselves by making as much of the package as bespoke as possible," says Matt

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The Friedman JEL-100 is a signature amp created in collaboration with former Ozzy Osbourne guitarist Jake E Lee

SHOP TALK

DAVE FRIEDMAN
FRIEDMAN AMPLIFICATION

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

After three decades as an amplifier guru to the stars, Dave Friedman knows a thing or two about classic British rock tone – and he claims there's plenty of life left in the 100-watt amplifier head

Laced throughout the history of guitar amplification is a rare cadre of amp makers who somehow 'had the ears' to identify and dial in the sounds that players were seeking. Dave Jennings undoubtedly had 'em with JMI/Vox. Howard Dumble's ears are legendary. Likewise Ken Fischer of Trainwreck fame. More recently, Dave Friedman has proven time and again that he's able to nail the tones that fuel 21st-century rock.

If he's heard it once, he's heard it a thousand times. "Some people have said my amps don't sound like a Marshall," says Dave. "Well, first off, what Marshall are you referring to? What reference point? It doesn't sound like a JVM? Or a 900 or a 2000 or an 800? They're all different. Or a Plexi? When someone says the word 'Plexi', what Plexi sound are you talking about? Are you talking about AC/DC or the blown-up Van Halen sort of thing? Or do you mean somewhere between the two? Classic rock like Free, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith and acts like that? What are you talking about?"

Indeed. What are you talking about? The simple fact is that Friedman has honed that ferocious aural feast we somewhat generically call 'the Marshall sound' to the extent that his amplifiers often offer a more direct route to classic British rock tones than the vintage originals themselves.

You might think you want a 50-watt Plexi but try plugging into this Friedman Small Box and Dirty Shirley instead and then you'll see what really turns you on.

In a nutshell, if it's within the breadth of rock guitar, Dave Friedman has nailed *that* sound. He's been dialling it in for many of the world's biggest players for years and, even before you knew Dave Friedman existed, there's a good chance that killer rock guitar tone you heard wailing from the radio or arena stage was coming courtesy of amps that he built or modified.

GO WEST

An avid guitarist and gear nut during his high-school years in Detroit, Friedman headed out to California shortly after graduating at the age of 18. He got stuck right in, finding his feet in the LA rock industry and quickly gaining the trust – and the business – of a veritable who's who of star guitarists.

"I went to work for Andy Brauer Studio Rentals at the age of 18," says Friedman. "They did studio and instrument rentals and cartage for all the top studio musicians, such as Steve Lukather, Dean Parks, Mike Laundau, Dan Huff – all these guys. That's where I started my musical education. He had a guy at the time doing some rigs and racks for him, and he left.

"TO ME, THE QUINTESSENTIAL AMP IS AN OLD PLEXI SUPER LEAD CIRCUIT WITH A VARIAC, SET TO 10, WHICH IS GAINY IF IT'S SET UP RIGHT BUT IT'S OLD-SCHOOL GAINY"

I had been watching him doing stuff, and I was like, 'Hey, I think I can do that for you'."

At the tail-end of the rack boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Friedman jumped over to working with Bruce Egnater at Egnater Amplification, and was soon a partner in creating several groundbreaking tube preamps and heads, including the original hand-wired pre-Rocktron Egnater IE-4 four channel tube rack preamp.

"Bruce was the mentor to my future, as far as amplification goes," says Friedman. But it's also clear that the young builder – then still in his early twenties – was extremely motivated. "I was always the driven guy," he says. "I've always worked. I have an idea in my head and I don't see any reason I can't accomplish it."

MODS AND ROCKERS

The gulf between being an in-demand tech and launching his own brand was bridged for Friedman by way of several amp mods and, eventually, custom-builds that more and more artists began requesting.

"I was dabbling in modifying Marshalls with the IE-4 channel that I'd developed," he says, "which would have been some time in the early to mid-1990s. At some point, I did a custom amp by request for Billy Howardell from A Perfect Circle. He really, really loved this Naylor Superdrive 60 amplifier. But he wanted to merge it a bit with his 100-watt Marshall. So, the mod was kind of the front end of the Naylor but with some DNA from the Marshall in the power amp.

"That became the amp with which he recorded the first A Perfect Circle album, as well as all the acclaimed stuff he's ever done after that. There was a short period of time that I made a run of amps called Naked Amplifiers, which were clones of that original amp. This would've probably been late 1990s or early 2000s. There were a few amps for the US, and a small run of amps for Japan, a dozen or so."

Wind your mind back two decades to examine the amp market circa 2000, and you'd think the last thing guitarists would need was another big 50- or 100-watt Marshall wannabe. Yet that's what Friedman delivered, and his amps cut so deeply to the heart of what players were hearing in their heads that they became near-overnight successes. Friedman amps hit the shelves and soon hard-working journeyman players and weekend warriors alike were finding they now had access to the sounds of some of the world's biggest stars.

GAINS AND LOSSES

For the man himself, the dual keys to success lay in identifying which classic rock tones players were really seeking, and bottling them into products that would deliver them consistently and efficiently, and at the volumes required in modern venues. As often as not, Friedman tells us, the former lies in a lot less firepower than players think they need, and the latter requires applying the reins to make it more playable.

"Sometimes," says Friedman, "if you give people the exact sound they're asking for, maybe even the exact amp – have them play through the exact rig that was used on this or that famous recording – they might be shocked to know that it uses a lot less gain than they thought it did.

"I make amps that have a lot of gain too but that's not necessarily where my head's at. I do it for the people that want more. To me, the quintessential amp is an old Plexi Super Lead circuit with a Variac, set to 10. That's where my head is, which is quite gainy if it's set up right but it's old-school gainy. You know, more the Van Halen school of Plexi, shall we say.

"That's where everything stemmed from originally with my amplifiers. I have an original 1968 50-watt Marshall Plexi that I've run for years with a Variac. I used to slave it. I used to do a bunch of things with it. But the initial tone of my BE channel was designed to clone that sound. Sometime I want to have a video done taking my BE-100 Deluxe amplifier and saying, 'Let's compare it to a 2203, a Plexi and other classics, and let's try to clone the sound,' just because I'm sick of people going, 'It doesn't sound like a Marshall,' you know?"

FACING PAGE Dave Friedman with Whitesnake guitarist Joel Hoekstra, one of the amp guru's many star clients

MASTER MIND

One of Friedman's more notable accomplishments, to the ears of many players who love his amps is the ability to deliver big-sounding classic rock tones at whatever volume the venue requires – or, as is more often the case these days, lack of volume. The master volume circuits on most Friedman amps are nothing particularly original in and of themselves. They're not even especially advanced. Instead, it's the way he voices the tone ahead of that stage that enables the big sound at lower volumes, and a consistently dynamic playing feel even at club or rehearsal levels.

"There's nothing really special about my master," Friedman admits. "It's just how the entire amp is voiced. I generally voice amps at low volumes, and I think of that like when you're mixing a record, and if you mix at low volumes and get everything really balanced and sounding great, as you turn it up, it sounds great. Now, if you mix that record at high volumes and then turn it down, it generally doesn't sound right at all.

"So I kind of voice the amps at a low volume so they sort of feel like their cranked up loud, you know? I don't put a lot of bass in the front end of the amps, because I find that that generally clutters the gain-staging. It sounds more overloaded or farty or however you want to look at it. I specifically leave out a lot of low end at the front end of the amp but it's made up for in the power amp. So, with all of that voicing and the preamp changes and everything, that's part of why that master seems to work great. No-one else makes 100-watt amps any more and we manage to sell an awful lot of them."

To clarify, Friedman confirms that the individual channel masters in his amps – which is all that most of them have – are not the vaunted post-phase-inverter master volume that so many amp fanatics and DIY enthusiasts rave about these days. Instead, they're good old end-of-preamp-stage masters that rein in the fury prior to the phase inverter.

"The post-phase-inverter is an interesting concept," says Friedman. "But generally I don't care for it, because it takes the negative feedback loop out of the amplifier, so as you turn it down, you're losing some of that negative feedback loop, and it makes the amp brighter and harsher. There are ways to compensate for that but they change the frequency response.

"These days, I'd much rather use something like a Fryette Power Station. Especially the new 100-watt model he came out with recently. That thing sounds amazing. I did a rig for Toshi Yanagi, who plays on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* show, and that was the first time I heard the 100-watt version. I have the other version and I'm friends with Stevie [Fryette], so I texted him and I was just cursing him out. 'Goddamn you for making an even better product!'"

STAR GAZING

Having headed to Los Angeles in the footsteps of his many guitar heroes some 33 years ago, Friedman is now deep into a career during which he has been privileged to work with many of them. "The funny thing was," says Friedman, "Steve Stevens was a favourite, Eddie Van Halen was a favourite, so was Jake E Lee, George Lynch, Warren DeMartini, Angus Young, Jimmy Page.

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"I GENERALLY VOICE AMPS AT LOW VOLUMES, AND I THINK OF THAT LIKE WHEN YOU'RE MIXING A RECORD. IF YOU MIX AT LOW VOLUMES AND GET EVERYTHING SOUNDING GREAT, AS YOU TURN IT UP, IT SOUNDS GREAT"

This was the era. Later on, I was a big fan of Ty Tabor, and all the classic stuff too. Aerosmith and Free and bands like that. Most of those players I've worked for. I think the only one I haven't yet, although that might be happening soon, is Warren DeMartini."

The latest signature model out of the Friedman stable is the JEL-100, a scorching hand-wired limited edition 100-watt head created for former Ozzy Osbourne guitarist Jake E Lee.

"He hasn't really been a relevant guitar player since he came out of the 1980s era with Ozzy," says Friedman. "He disappeared for a number of years and then he came back. I did the project just as a kind of fun thing for myself. But then a guy at Fender told me, 'Wait, you'll see. We've sold an awful lot of his guitars with Charvel. More than we ever thought we would'. We went to NAMM with this amp, and we sold 150 100-watt heads in two days. Just gone. And that's the signed limited-edition red amp that costs $3,700. So apparently the 100-watt's not dead. And there are certain iconic artists that are still viable to a lot of people in the market."

Although Friedman's amps are all vintage-inspired in many respects – given that most have some sonic DNA derived from his favourite '68 Plexi-and-Variac topology – the company hasn't produced any models based directly on classics of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Not yet anyway.

"There is still a business model in my head," he says, "to do a vintage series of amps. Some of them would be British and some of them would be American. I'd really like to do that, because that's where everything came from; what's my take on it? I would do it in a way that would be cloning my '68 Plexi 50 or, like, 'Here's this special Vox AC30 that we have'. Something interesting like that. That might be happening in the future. Although the future right now is a little unsteady."

Unsteady or otherwise, we can be certain that Friedman's amplifiers will be behind much of the music when it finally returns in full force – and we haven't even made it to his pedals, pickups or the new line of guitars designed in conjunction with Grover Jackson. All fodder for another time.

Visit friedmanamplification.com for more

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DIY WORKSHOP

EASY AND AFFORDABLE HUMBUCKER AND P-90 PICKUP MODS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Unhappy with your tone? Before you throw money at the problem and install a new set of pickups, try these simple modifications first. You may find your existing pickups can be tweaked to sound better than you'd ever imagined…

If you've ever investigated pickup construction, you may have noticed that most are made with exactly the same ingredients. All you need are some flats or bobbins, magnet wire, magnets, screws, slugs and wax. So how there can be such variation in output and tonal characteristics?

It's a dark and complex art, but part of the alchemy is understanding how to combine those ingredients and make seemingly minor changes that can elevate your guitar's performance from the mundane to the sublime. Most of us swap pickups from time to time but have you considered modifying the pickups you already have?

Changing the component parts can dramatically change tone and output, and it will cost you far less than a new set of pickups. You can learn a lot in the process too, which may help you differentiate the snake oil from the science if you do eventually decide to upgrade.

The P-90 and PAF-style humbucker mods covered here are entry-level stuff but you'll still need to take care when getting

1 Changing the pole screws is as simple as unscrewing the old ones and screwing in new ones, and you don't need to remove the pickup cover

2 With a soldering iron, a single-sided razor blade and possibly a veneer saw, it's easy to break the solder joints and remove the covers

3 A cover can make or break a pickup's tone, and improvements can be made by changing or even removing them

into it. Both the P-90 and the PAF-style humbucker are ideal for such modifications because their modular construction means there are several things you can try, and for the most part all you need are a couple of screwdrivers and a pair of pliers.

SCREW SWAPS

P-90s have pole screws and PAF-style humbuckers have screws and slugs – none of which are permanent magnets. Instead, magnets are located under the bobbins and, because the screws and slugs are ferric, the magnetic field passes through them. The screws are a component that only pickup-makers tend to talk about.

Not all steel is created equal. It's graded by carbon content but we'll leave the academic treatise on metallurgy for another occasion. All we need to know for now is that the screws do have a subtle impact on tone, grades with a higher number equate to higher carbon content, and anybody with a flathead screwdriver can swap them.

Most pickup parts suppliers don't bother to specify the grade of their pole screws, so it's worth asking before you buy or finding a supplier that does. According to Jon Gundry, owner of ThroBak Electronics, vintage screws varied from 1006 to 1018 grade steel. Try 1010 screws for a sweet, smooth and more vintage tone with a rounded attack. For more upper mids, punch and percussiveness, try 1018, 1020 or even 1022. A set of six screws should cost you £5 or less.

Higher-carbon screws can help lend you additional brightness as well as clarity. You can get more bite and aggression too, but higher carbon can be counterproductive when combined with loose coils and naturally bright vintage-style pickups. This simple mod involves unscrewing the old screws and screwing the replacements back in. Try an electric screwdriver; it takes forever with a manual one.

COVERS OFF

Covered humbuckers are a stumbling block but once you know how to remove and refit them, it's game on for all of our mods. Humbucker covers are fixed with a couple of solder blobs and those joints must be broken to get in. My method is to use a soldering iron set to 450°C to melt the solder as quickly as possible, then use a solder sucker to remove the majority of it.

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You can cut through some of the remaining solder while it's still hot using a single-sided razor blade or once it has cooled, using a veneer saw. With unpotted humbuckers, the cover should simply ease off. But potted pickups may need to be heated with a hairdryer before the cover will loosen enough.

Removing the covers was probably the very first PAF mod. Rock players began doing it in the belief that they could get more output and therefore more overdrive, and reduce squeal. But whether removing humbucker covers increases loudness or brightness is open to debate.

I hear a difference: more air frequencies and harmonic bloom. There's increased openness but some of the vocal quality you can get with covered humbuckers is lost. It's a trade off, and if you like brighter and more aggressive tones, you'll probably prefer the covers removed.

COVER VERSIONS

Much depends on the covers themselves, because if they are thick and heavy, you may struggle for clarity and chime, and string-to-string separation can suffer too. Vintage PAF covers weigh about 24 grams and were pressed from thin nickel. I recently tested some highly regarded vintage repros that weighed 32 grams and, at 0.7mm, were 0.25mm thicker than vintage covers.

They had all the right curves and contours, and the ageing was impressive, but they had a detrimental effect on clarity and harmonics. Swapping them for cheap nickel covers that were nearly identical in weight, thickness and tap tone to the vintage ones made a huge improvement. Testing a vintage PAF with and without its cover, I feel the cover has a very slight sweetening and balancing effect. Seth Lover probably chose the materials and thickness to minimise the cover's sonic impact.

If your humbuckers sound dull, consider removing or upgrading the covers. If the stock covers are brass, you'll notice a major difference. But be aware that even in the PAF replica world, vintage looks can be prioritised over tone. Also, if your pickups are wax potted and wound hot, they might not have enough treble content to make cover swapping worthwhile.

If you find that your humbuckers are too microphonic, try attaching a large piece of masking tape to the inside of the cover.

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You could also apply a few small dabs of silicone sealant between the slugs to dampen the covers down before replacing them.

Whether they're soapbars or dogears, using P-90s without covers isn't really an option. But you can still change the covers. Try plastic instead of metal if you need more bite and clarity, or vice versa if you want mellower and woodier tones. If you have chrome-plated covers and like the metal look but need greater clarity, nickel-plated covers might help.

MAGNETIC PERSONALITIES

Magnets are mysterious, especially among the guardians of PAF lore. For our purposes, there are three factors to consider: smooth and rough (sand cast) magnets, magnet length, and the type of alloy.

It's easy to spot the difference between smooth and rough cast magnets because they look exactly as you'd expect. Whether they sound different is contentious. Some argue that rough magnets sound warmer in the treble and have a softer bass response.

Others claim the surface texture makes no audible difference, and point out that, for humbuckers, the thin edges are ground smooth to make proper physical contact with the slugs and keeper bar. But when it comes to vintage Gibson pickups, they all have magnets with rough appearance, so that's what the vast majority of boutique replicas come with.

Gibson changed the length of the magnets in about 1961. There was some crossover, with short magnets documented on 1950s PAFs and long magnets used beyond 1961. Actual lengths varied but for our purposes 'long' magnets measure about 2.5 inches and they were shortened by between 0.125 and 0.25 inches.

The debate about tonal differences is complicated because alnico V magnets became standardised at around the time of the length change. But those who detect tonal differences suggest that short alnico V magnets are sweeter in the highs and have stronger mids than the longer equivalents.

POLES APART

The various grades of alnico magnets used in P-90s and PAFs all have distinct tonal characteristics. However, there is some confusion, because our natural tendency to think in terms of worst/better/best makes everything subjective.

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4 P-90s and humbuckers usually come with alnico or ceramic magnets and you can alter the tone by using different grades of alnico

5 To remove a humbucker magnet, you'll need to slacken the four bobbin retainer screws. You may need to retract the pole screws too

6 Once the bobbins are loosened, the humbucker magnet will slide straight out of the open end

6

Since we all hear things differently, listening for yourself through a familiar rig will always be the best option. But for what it's worth, here's what I've found when testing full-length alnico magnets using loosely wound, unpotted coils that are offset to vintage specs and enclosed in thin nickel covers.

There are differences in brightness, bass response, output, sustain and sensitivity but for vintage PAF tone, alnico V and alnico II seem to be the most convincing. I find alnico V the closest of all, because it has a mid-scoop at precisely the right frequency band to create a cocked-wah quack, while not being too hyped and harsh in the upper mids. Sustain, output and sensitivity impress too.

Alnico II isn't as scooped and it's a tad more rounded and forward in the upper mids. With the correct amp settings, it can produce a detailed and pretty tone. But it doesn't have quite as much bass or heft as alnico V, and it can get rather harsh. In contrast, I find alnico IV has the most even frequency response, with very balanced mids but a slightly neutral quality that some may find lacking in character.

Alnico III sounds like a kinder and gentler alnico V, with similar midrange characteristics and very sweet but open treble. It's lower in output but the weaker magnetism helps sustain, and it would be an ideal choice if you're looking for mellower humbucker tones with plenty of character, rather than an aggressive edge.

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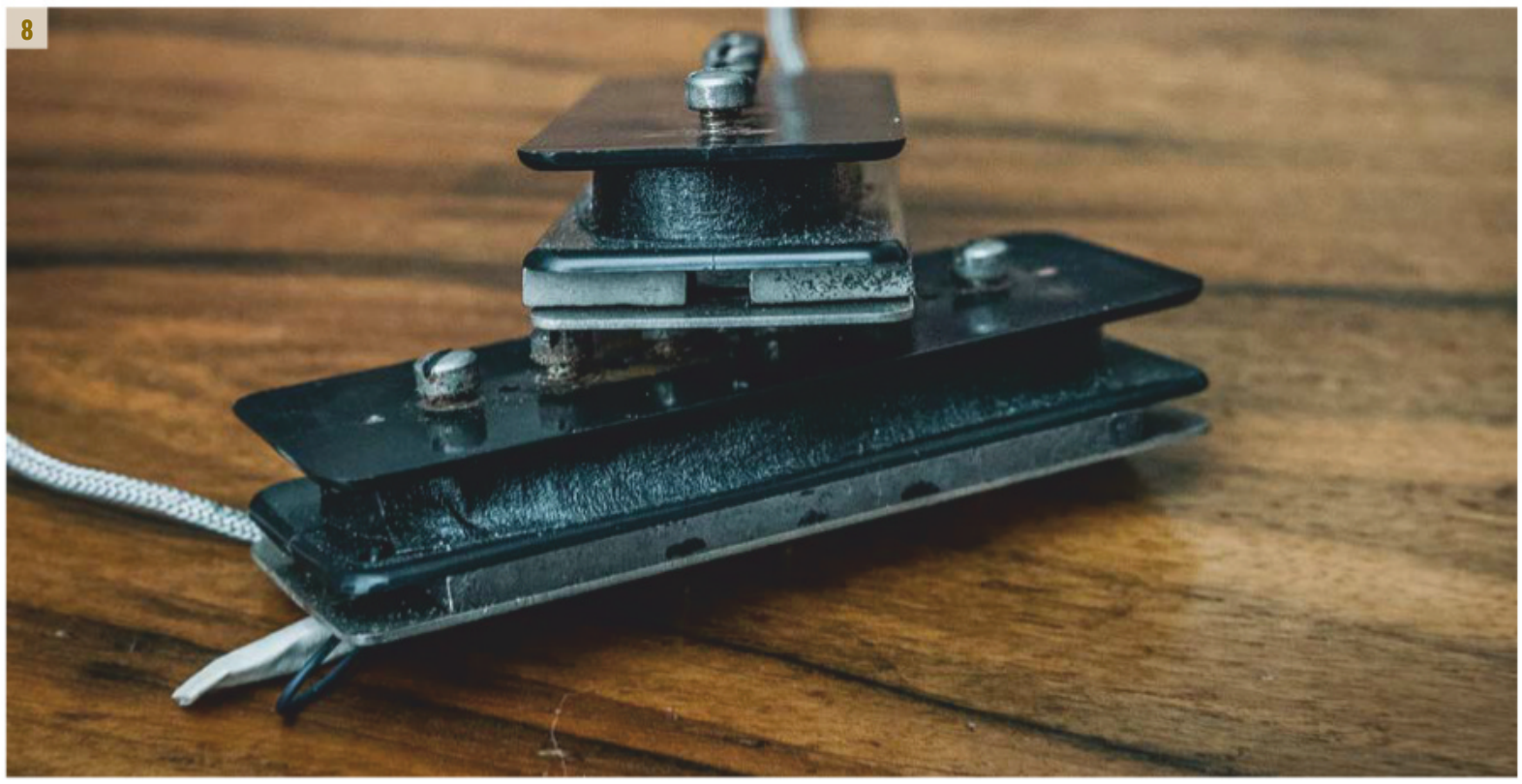

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7 P-90 bobbins are held on with two screws and, after slackening those, you'll be able to slide out the magnets

8 These P-90 magnets are aligned but they can be deliberately offset to alter the tone, and you may notice a more vintage quality

9 The bobbins of these vintage Gibson PAFs are held in place with four brass screws but using steel bobbin screws produces a slightly different sound

Alnico VIII and ceramic magnets are very popular for heavy rock and metal, where aggression, high output and definition across the frequency spectrum is required. They aren't vintage spec but old isn't necessarily best.

Swapping magnets is easy. Simply loosen the four screws under the baseplate by a few millimetres to free the bobbins, gently grip the exposed end of the magnet with fine-nose pliers and pull it out. If the pole screws are screwed into the baseplate, you may need to slacken those off too, but you don't need to remove them from the bobbin entirely.

The magnet's south edge should be marked but, if it isn't, then use a compass to determine which edge is the south. The south edge goes on the screw side but there are some exceptions to that. The bridge pickups of three-pickup Les Paul Customs and Varitone-equipped semis are oriented with the north magnetic pole on the screw side. And if you want the Peter Green in-between tone, you need to flip the neck magnet so north is facing the screw side.

P-90 MAGNETS

P-90 magnets are the same size as PAF magnets but you'll need two magnets for each pickup. While uncertainty remains about vintage PAF magnets, most agree that alnico III was used in P-90s from their debut in 1946 until Gibson began the transition to alnico V around 1957.

Everything said about the tonal characteristics of the various grades of alnico magnets in PAFs applies to P-90s. If yours are too edgy, try alnico III. If you need more power and bite, try alnico V or even ceramic. Like in PAFs, it's still the convention for the magnet's south pole to face the screw side, which means the P-90 magnets will try to repel each other when they're installed in the assembly.

Removing and replacing P-90 and PAF magnets is an almost identical procedure but P-90s only have two bobbin screws. Another trick you can try is offsetting P-90 magnets by a few millimetres. Lots of P-90s ended up that way and you might hear a quackier vintage tone. It's something you can try with your stock magnets too.

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EXTRA POLEPIECES?

This may be the nerdiest mod of all but dogear P-90 fixing screws and PAF bobbin screws (number two diameter, 0.5-inch length) can function as extra polepieces. In P-90s the fixing screws are located between the A and D, and G and B pole screws. The vintage screws were brass but to make this work you need steel.

The very first PAFs had steel bobbin screws but Gibson very quickly changed over to brass. Even so, steel screws did show up on occasion and they have been documented on Peter Green's Burst and one of Paul Kossoff's. Maybe it even explains why Duane Allman insisted on hanging onto his pickups when he swapped his '57 Goldtop for a '59 Burst.

In a nutshell, steel screws give P-90s and PAFs a little more bite, additional edge and more of a midrange push. Everything else being equal, brass screws will give you more sweetness, clarity and smoother dynamics. As ever, what you prefer depends on your priorities, your playing style and how your guitar interacts with the rest of your rig.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The artistry in pickup making is the way the coils are wound and an understanding of how all the components sound and interact. Even if you're stuck with your coils, almost everything else can be changed and the affordable mods covered here can dramatically alter the tone of your pickups.

If this has piqued your interest, check in again soon for Fender and Gretsch pickup mods. Many thanks to Stuart Robson of Sunbear Pickups (sunbearpickups.com) for his invaluable assistance with this article.

AMPLIFIER FAQ

Can vintage guitar amps be dangerous? Rift main-man Chris Fantana explains what needs to be done to make old tube amps safe

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

Early 1950s Fender 5A3 Deluxe amps are impressive performers but swapping the old two-prong US mains plugs for modern three-prong units is vital for maintaining safety

Hi, Chris. I bought a vintage tweed Deluxe from Reverb and it has the old two-prong US mains plug on it. First of all, I need a step-down transformer, right? But is it dangerous to persist with the old mains cable? Should I get that changed?
CLIVE, SWANSEA

Hi, Clive. Thanks for writing in. Congratulations on your purchase. Those old Fenders are just wonderful to play and, supported by regular maintenance, they should keep going indefinitely. A couple of *Guitar.com* contributors own TV Front 5A3 Deluxe amps, which consistently outperform boutique models that cost twice the price. That's quite a feat considering that the Deluxe, along with the Champ and Princeton, was considered a student model in Fender's early line-up.

The electrical safety regulations in the mid-to-late 1950s were nowhere near as strict as they are today, especially for the North American domestic market. Wall sockets were (and in some old buildings still are) simple unpolarised two-prong affairs. This meant that the corresponding plug on an appliance could be inserted either way with no respect for live and neutral phasing. If your device was a toaster, kettle, coffee machine or any other domestic unit, it would work fine; you wouldn't notice a difference in operation.

However, valve equipment such as radios, televisions and, of course, guitar amplifiers would be more susceptible to hum and buzz if the mains plug was connected the wrong way around. Rather than having to unplug the device from the wall and plug it in the correct way, Fender included a chassis-mounted ground switch on some amplifiers, which allowed users to reverse the mains wiring inside the amplifier. I shudder to think how dangerous this is. Somehow it was allowed for many years.

Furthermore, in order to provide an AC ground so that the chassis could provide RF shielding, a capacitor was connected between the internal neutral wire and the metal chassis – a practise borrowed from radio and television design. Unfortunately though, when normal capacitors fail, they tend to short, rather than go 'open'. This meant that if the amplifier was plugged in incorrectly (internal neutral to AC live) and the capacitor failed, AC mains voltage would appear on the chassis itself and, by extension, your guitar strings. All you'd need to do is touch a proper ground such as a microphone with your lips and mains voltage could surge through your body causing catastrophic injury. This capacitor was eventually nicknamed the 'death cap', thanks to its too-long list of victims. Reportedly,

it even contributed to the untimely death of former Yardbirds lead singer Keith Relf when he stepped on a copper gas pipe in his basement while practicing electric guitar.

Thankfully, electrical regulations have come a long way since then and polarised three-prong mains sockets and plugs have become the norm. The third prong is the safety earth, and is now a minimum requirement in nearly all countries. The UK has the most advanced and safe mains plug and socket regulations in the world, and for good reason.

So what must you do to use your amp safely? Even when using a step-down transformer, there are four more things that'll make your amp as safe as possible.

Firstly, replace the old mains cable with a modern three-prong type and use strain reliefs both inside and outside the chassis. Secondly, you should rewire the mains fuse to the live wire, upstream of the on/off switch, and completely bypass the ground switch.

Thirdly, replace the on/off switch to a DPST type, so that both the live and neutral wires are switched. This is essential with captive mains cables.

Finally connect the earth wire directly to the chassis on its own mounting. Don't use one of the transformer mounting bolts. Depending on the amp, you might have to drill a hole to do so. I use an M3 machine screw with both a shake-proof washer and a nyloc nut. This is the safety-earth bond and must be as secure as possible. It's the most important connection in the amp. The ground wire should be left longer than the live and neutral, so that in the event of it being pulled out, the safety earth is the last to go.

With all that done, you can play safe in the knowledge that whatever fault occurs in the amp, you are protected from electric shock. G

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

VOLUME
VOLUME
TONE
Bigsby
PATENT
No.D-169,120

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4

1 This Gibson Trini Lopez Standard was a long time coming and a total dream guitar

2 This Bigsby B7, however, looks a little too new for our liking

3, 4 Gibson mimics the look of decades-old grime build-up by factory ageing its hardware using chemicals

TECH TALK

HOW TO AGE A BIGSBY TAILPIECE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

Adding a shiny new vibrato to a guitar with vintage or relic'd hardware can spoil its carefully crafted aesthetic. Here, we'll help make your brand-new Bigsby look like it has aged gracefully

Call me irresponsible but I bought a guitar in the middle of a pandemic. Not just any guitar. A dream guitar. Offered to me at a price I could not refuse. That dream guitar happens to be a very special Gibson Trini Lopez Standard built for NAMM 2019. I couldn't be more thrilled. Sure, I would've loved this one in red but I'll get over the finish soon enough.

As part of the deal, the seller included a spanking new Bigsby B7 vibrato, which is a component that's practically mandatory when I acquire a semi-hollow instrument. I love the look, the performance, and the tonal options that come with having a vibrato. Truly, Jazzmasters have ruined me.

There was one significant problem: the brand-new Bigsby made for a horrible contrast with the already tastefully aged hardware and VOS finish package. I hadn't come this far and purchased a dream guitar with tons of vibe just to slap on a shiny part and throw off my whole aesthetic, so I did what any self-respecting guitar owner would: I set about ageing that Bigsby by a few years in a matter of days.

Bigbsy vibratos come from the factory looking highly polished, with a gleaming presence that matches most of the modern production guitars they will be fitted to. In the case of instruments such as mine, however, that beaming newborn complexion sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb, which won't do at all.

The nickel hardware on this Trini has been chemically aged, a process that simulates years of sweat build-up by plunging the pieces into a bath made up of any number of chemical agents, ranging from industrial to everyday household items. It's standard practice in the industry, along with using rock tumblers to give the parts a hard-worn and pitted look. Both practises are valid, and can be combined to create a finish that's vintage-accurate and attractive.

I'm DIY all the way but I'm in no way motivated to actually buy something to a part look dull. In the hope of adding a generation of cosmetic wear to my Bigsby, I turn instead to a trusted old favourite: distilled white vinegar.

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5 Distilled white vinegar is the main ingredient here

6 Bathing the Bigsby – paper towels help with total submersion

7 After about five hours, we start to see some oxidation. We leave it in the vinegar bath overnight and see what it looks like in the morning

8

8 The aluminium is starting to look properly aged. To judge our progress, we pull it out of the vinegar, rinse it off lightly, and inspect our work

9

9 Our false patina looks pretty good but we let it go a little longer

10 Note that the arm, roller and string anchor bars are nickel-plated and therefore don't react as strongly to the vinegar

I use white vinegar all the time in guitar repair. It's the first thing I turn to when I have, say, a vintage bridge saddle that's frozen due to rust. I pour a little vinegar in a bowl and let the part soak overnight. By the time I wake up, it's usually fully adjustable. It's also useful for removing rust from bridge plates and pickup covers, and because it's an everyday item, it's easy to keep around the house.

It's odd, then, that the same thing I use to remove rust might also be ideal for ageing a part, but remember: not all parts are created equal. Vinegar reacts with many metals, including iron, copper and aluminium. You can use it to clean those metals but leaving it on for any substantial length of time can cause oxidation – and what are a Bigsbys made of? Oh yeah, sand-cast aluminium.

What I'm going to do here is prepare my metal, pour some vinegar into a container and give that Bigsby a smelly bath. First, a warning: even the most well-intentioned students of the relic'ing process can ruin parts accidentally, so if you're going to do this job, know that artificially ageing parts is a risky business – and assume that all your warranties are now void.

To prep the Bigsby for its bath, I dull a bit of the shine to give the vinegar a little bit more to work with. A perfectly smooth surface would be less apt to oxidise under these conditions and, if you think about it, through years of use, parts do indeed lose their shine naturally.

For this task, I use some 800- and 1,000-grit sandpaper to degloss the Bigsby, following the stylised lines of the tailpiece, rather than sanding away in obvious straight lines as one might on a piece of wood. I then step up to 1,500-grit to smooth out some of the marks I've left on the body of the vibrato unit. Yes, I'm fake-ageing this part but I don't want it to *look* fake.

After this light work, I dismantle the vibrato, which includes removing the arm, spring and a few tiny parts that I don't want to risk ageing and thus rendering unusable. It's also advisable to remove the moving components of the Bigsby, including the string anchor/pivot mechanism and the string roller bar, but I have to admit that, due to sheer impatience, I don't go quite that far. But if you're using sterner stuff than vinegar, you can definitely damage the precision bearings that allow the Bigsby to work smoothly.

10

11

11 The Bigsby double-dips

12 The next day, we're finally happy with the look of this artificially aged Bigsby B7

13 Comparing the Bigsby's muted shine to that of the guitar's relic'd hardware

14 We think we're going to be happy with the way this vibrato blends in with the VOS finish and hardware package. Working up the courage to install the thing? That's another story. We may need a stiff drink before taking our own plunge...

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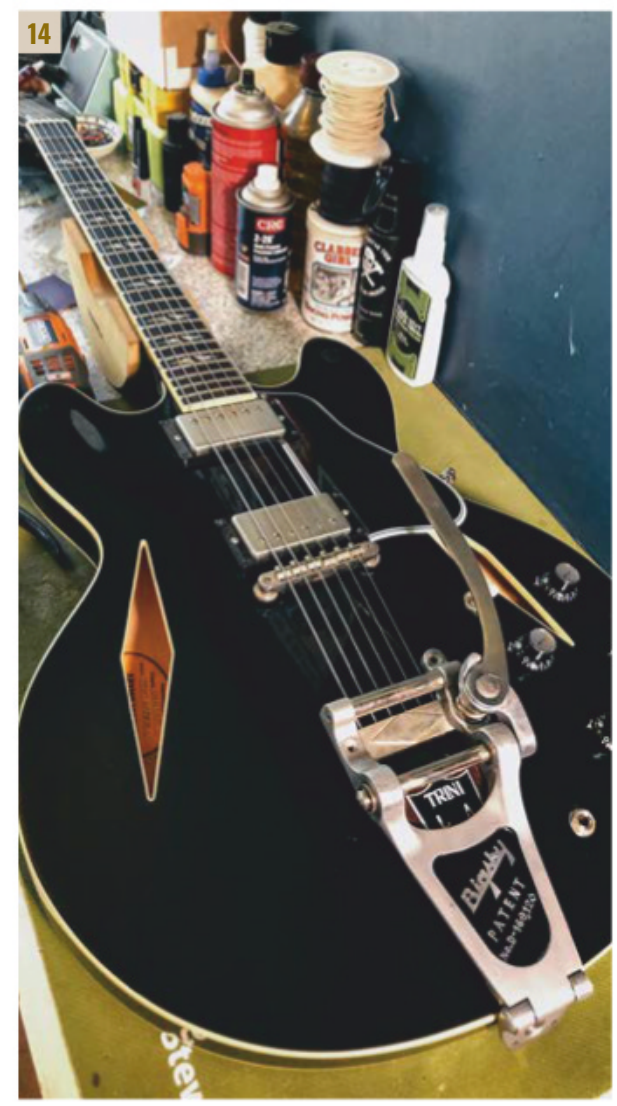

14

I ready a shallow container large enough for my vibrato, then pour enough distilled white vinegar in to cover it. The container I selected was the only suitable one in my kitchen drawer and slightly too shallow to fully submerge the entire part, so I use a paper towel to cover the bits that stick out above the vinegar line, which quickly soaks up enough to do the job.

Then comes the waiting. I started this process at about 4:00pm on a Saturday and start seeing the tiniest results within the first five or six hours of submersion, when the vinegar begins to go a little cloudy. However, it's not until the next day that the part really starts to take on the look I was after, and after about 24 hours it has definitely lost that sparkling new sheen.

I remove the vibrato and rinse it off, then compare it to the hardware on my new Trini. It's close but it's not quite there yet. So, I once again leave it in the vinegar bath overnight and, by the next morning the vibrato has finally achieved the proper aged patina.

In total, it took about 39 hours for the finish of the vibrato to match the hardware on my Gibson. I'm impressed. The process couldn't be simpler and, as long as you're patient, the vinegar does its job beautifully. Rinsing is a vital part of the process though; leave the vinegar to pool on the metal and evaporate and it will leave behind the telltale marks of sloppy relic'ing.

I didn't realise until I was already well underway that the arm, roller and string anchor bars and the stock spring won't age in the same way the aluminium body of the vibrato does. With most models, all the aforementioned 'extra' parts are plated, usually in nickel, so don't be alarmed if they don't come out looking as dull. Thankfully, this is also true of most vintage Bigsby vibratos as well, so it's still accurate.

So how does my kitchen-based attempt at hardware ageing fare against some of the big names in the relic biz? Well enough. I'm not trying to fool anybody and my goal wasn't to nail the look of a vintage Bigsby vibrato but rather to dial back the shine for my own satisfaction. If you get close to it, you can see some inconsistencies, as well as fluid lines in an area or two that I didn't rinse as well as I thought I had. But hey, it's good enough for me.

The best part is that I've just given it a head start – it will continue to age along with the guitar as it's played. All that's left is to work up the courage to put some holes in my new guitar! Wish me luck. G

For more where this came from, follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **BB KING**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Get behind the beat and master the hugely emotive blues stylings of one of the most influential and beloved blues players of all time

To describe the guitar playing of Riley B King as influential is almost selling him short. It's hard to find a guitar player who on some level doesn't owe a debt to the expressive and playing of the late, great Mississipi bluesman – many of them guitar legends in their own right.

From Clapton to Peter Green, Gary Moore to John Mayer and countless others besides, it's rare to find a player who hasn't cribbed something from BB King one way or another.

King is best known for his laidback style, wonderfully expressive vibrato and effortless phrasing. Coupled with his glorious guitar tone – usually created with the help of his signature Gibson ES-model Lucille and a Lab Series L5 amp – he set a high bar for blues playing.

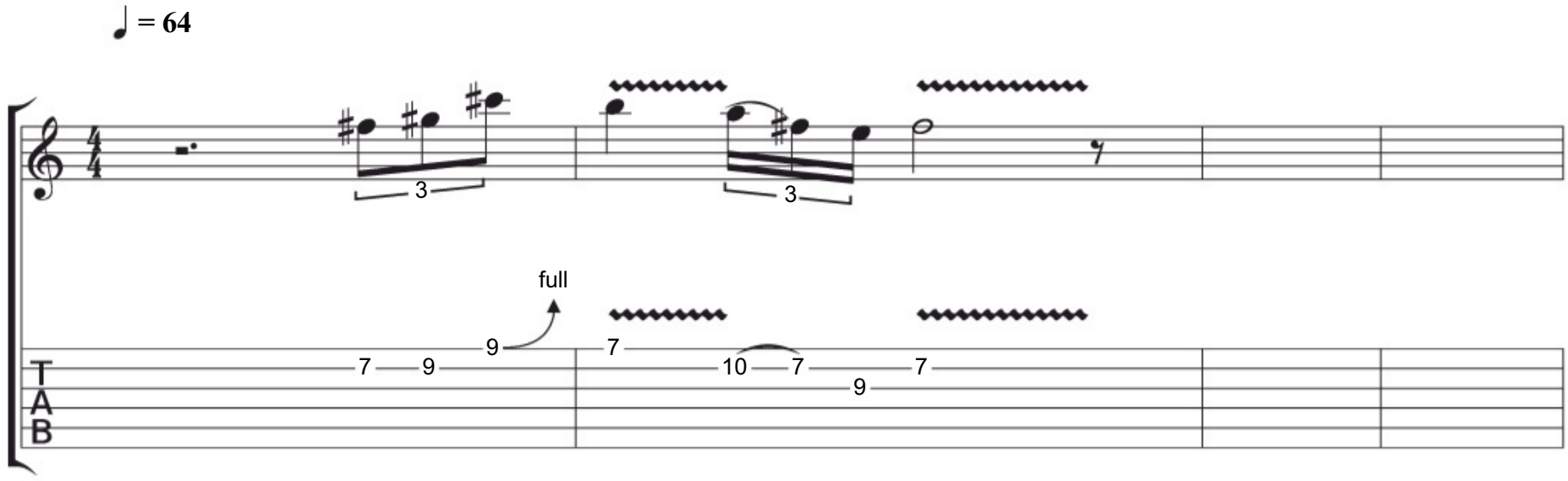
BB's was never too worried about getting somewhere in a hurry, so you won't have to worry about speed here. Instead, it's all about expression, and delivering the right notes at the right time.

All the licks in this lesson are in the key of B. A common trait of King's playing was to mix major and minor pentatonic scales, so you'll see the B minor and B major pentatonic scale below. Learn these two shapes and then imagine them overlaid on top of each other.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea, UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher.

LICK 1

BB often played ahead of the beat, with the aim of targeting a chord note at the end of a lick. This lick starts on beat 4 of bar 1, with the B note (7th fret of the E string) landing on beat 1 of bar 2. This would be a typical opening lick where the B note would land on the I chord, in this case the B chord. The lick's first phrase is taken from the B major pentatonic, and the second phrase from the B minor pentatonic.

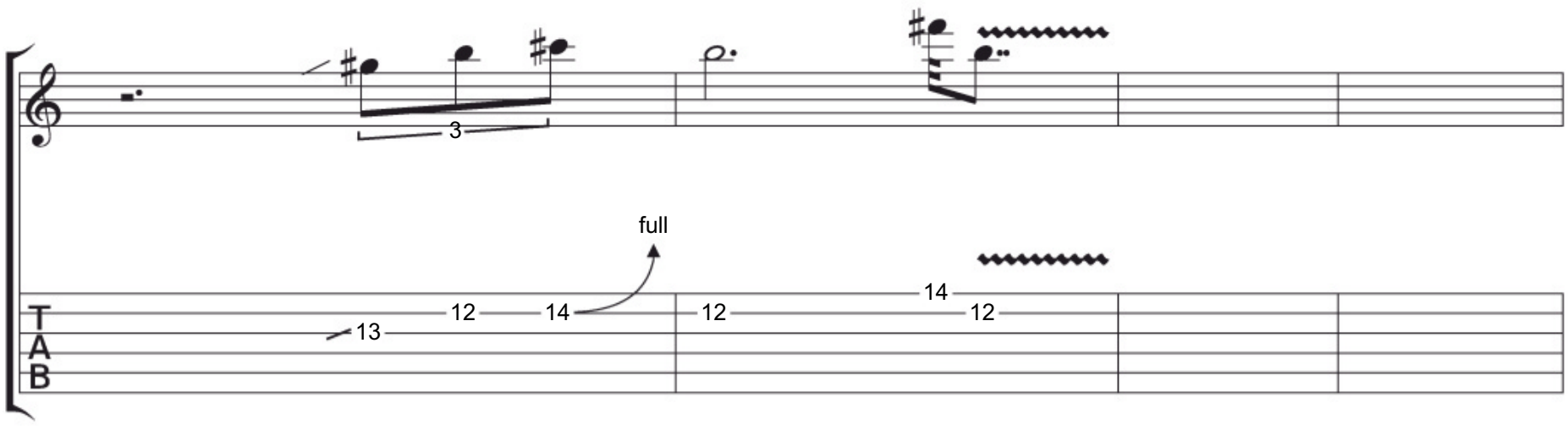


LICK 2

Sometimes BB would lean on jazz-style phrasings. This is a good example of a jazzy descending run that crosses between major and minor. The lick starts with a slide from the minor to major third on the high E string before running down the major pentatonic. There are a few major notes in the descending run here. The 8th fret of the G and the 6th fret of the A are both major thirds. The lick resolves back on the root note, so this would be a great lick to play back into a I chord.

LICK 3

If you take the top end of the third shape of the major pentatonic, you get an area of the fretboard known as the 'BB box'. This is a fantastic little five-note box that BB played with a lot. This lick is an example of a typical pattern you might see him play there. The final two notes are played in quick succession. You want the 14th fret on the E string to be just a passing note as you jump back to the root.

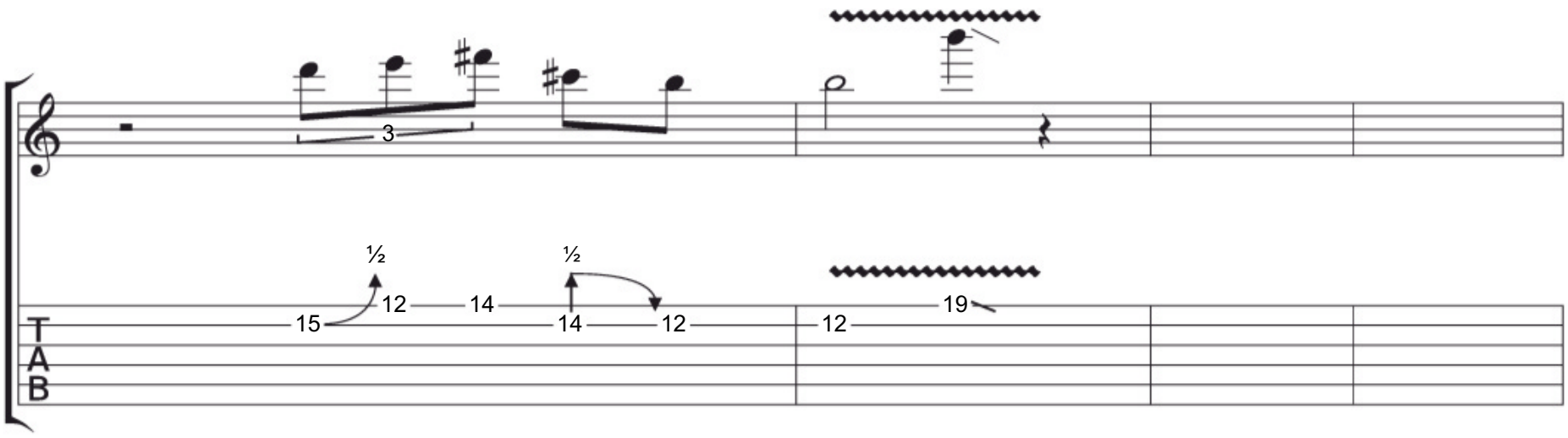


LICK 4

You can add a major third to the second shape of the minor pentatonic to lend it some interesting texture. BB would often start this type of lick in minor before going in and out of the major note and then finishing back in minor. Think of the constant change between major and minor third as a rhythmic pattern. It's shown here as straight 16th notes but you can play it with a little swing to really nail that BB vibe.

LICK 5

Using the BB box, you can also cross into the third shape of the minor pentatonic. The lick starts with a half-step bend on a minor note, the half step takes it to a major note. The lick ends with another BB trademark. Play the root note on the E string high up and slide it out. BB would often throw these notes into the middle of other licks. Try playing that high root note a few times before sliding out for a different take on the BB trademark.



TRY IT YOURSELF

The principle of playing across the major and minor pentatonics is transposable into every other key. The first position of both the major and minor pentatonics overlay closely so, once you have that overlaid shape in mind, it's easier to blend the major and minor notes together.

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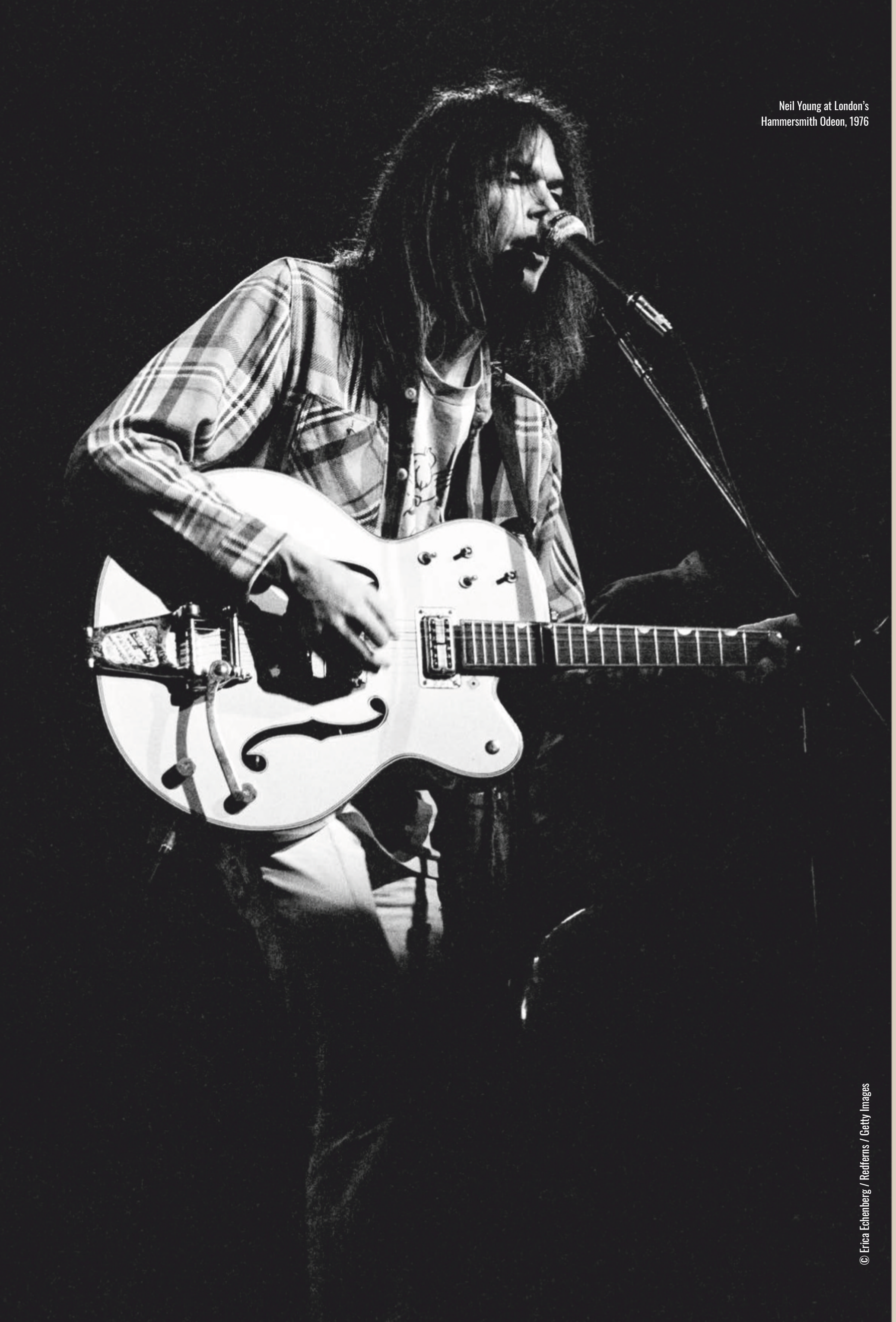


Neil Young at London's
Hammersmith Odeon, 1976

© Erica Echenberg / Redferns / Getty Images

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE NEIL YOUNG PART 2

WORDS ROD FOGG

We continue our examination of the chord shapes and patterns that have helped make Neil Young an icon by delving into the ways he adds harmonic richness to seemingly simple progressions

In his long songwriting career, Neil Young has touched on many musical styles but what sets his work apart are chord sequences that have a harmonic richness that belies their apparent simplicity.

Many artists with folk roots content themselves with the dependable major and minor chords but, for Young, major sevenths, sixths, minor sevenths and added ninths are a regular part of the vocabulary.

These chords allow him to add melodic interest to even the most basic structures. Elsewhere, he commonly uses slash chords to keep his harmonies interesting. It all adds up to a rich and enchanting chordal blend.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

Strum these three chords lightly on your acoustic, making a two-bar pattern by playing two chords per bar and returning to D major 7 after the D6 chord. Do your best not to hit either the A or E strings, and maybe start each two bars off by picking the open D string on its own?

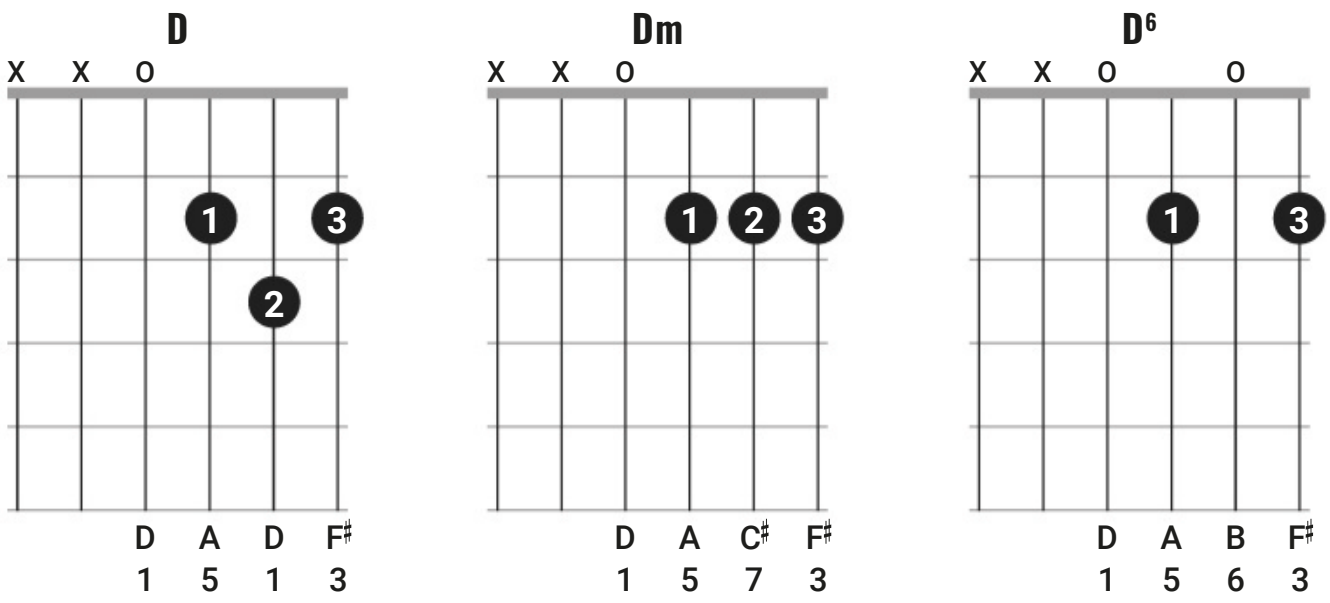


FIGURE 2

Starting on the D major chord from figure 1, add the first three chords of figure 2 to make a four-bar sequence. The D major also works well in front of the G and Gmaj7 chords. This example shows how Young integrates major and minor seventh chords into his songwriting without leaving his folk rock roots or ever sounding "jazzy".

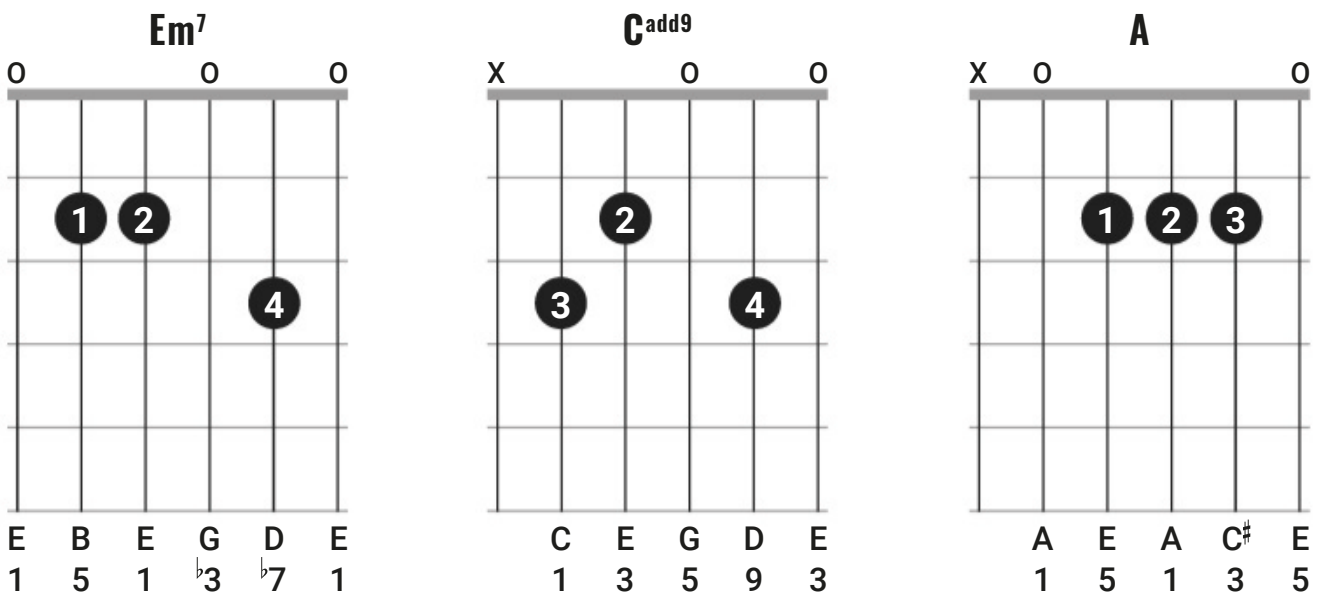


FIGURE 2 CONTINUED...

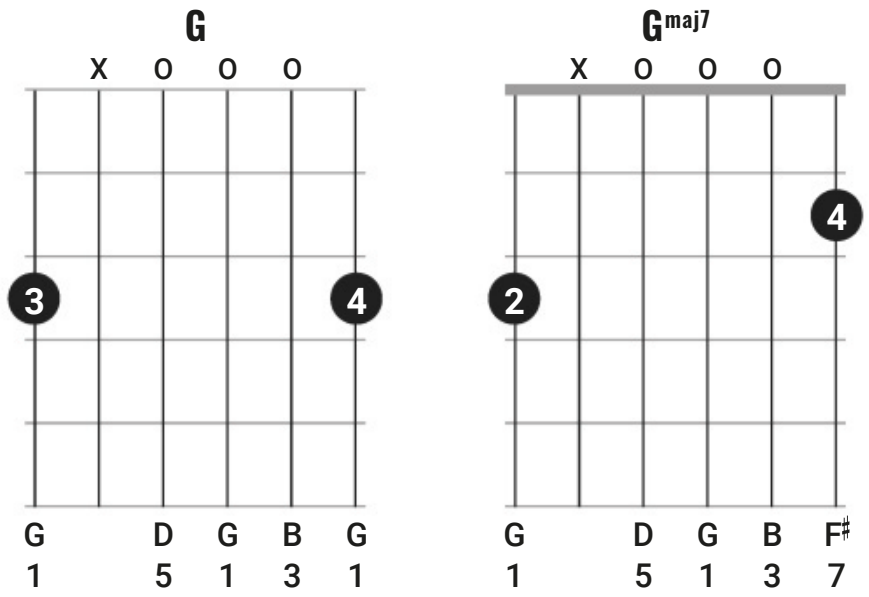


FIGURE 3 DADGBD TUNING

Young does not play in open tunings often but he has used this interesting example, a tuning known as double-drop D or D modal: DADGBD. Play the low D string in the bass and strum the C chord at the fifth fret. Then repeat the pattern strumming the D chord at the seventh fret. In this tuning, you get a major chord across the top four strings of the guitar, with the open D string adding tension underneath the C chord. You could turn this into a four-bar pattern using the open D ang G strings to add a single-note riff to answer the chords.

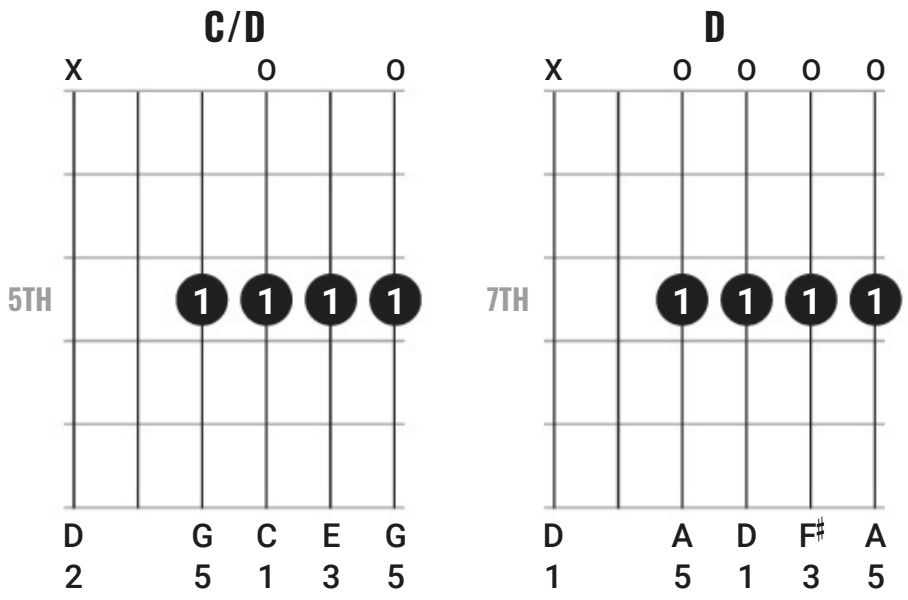


FIGURE 4 DADGBD TUNING

Another sequence in DADGBD, this one starts on a high G chord, which can also be played as a harmonic. Be careful to pick the open A string underneath the A minor seventh chord or it will sound just like the C/D chord from figure 3. These lush major and massive D5 chord voicings would be impossible to play if it were not for the open-string tuning.

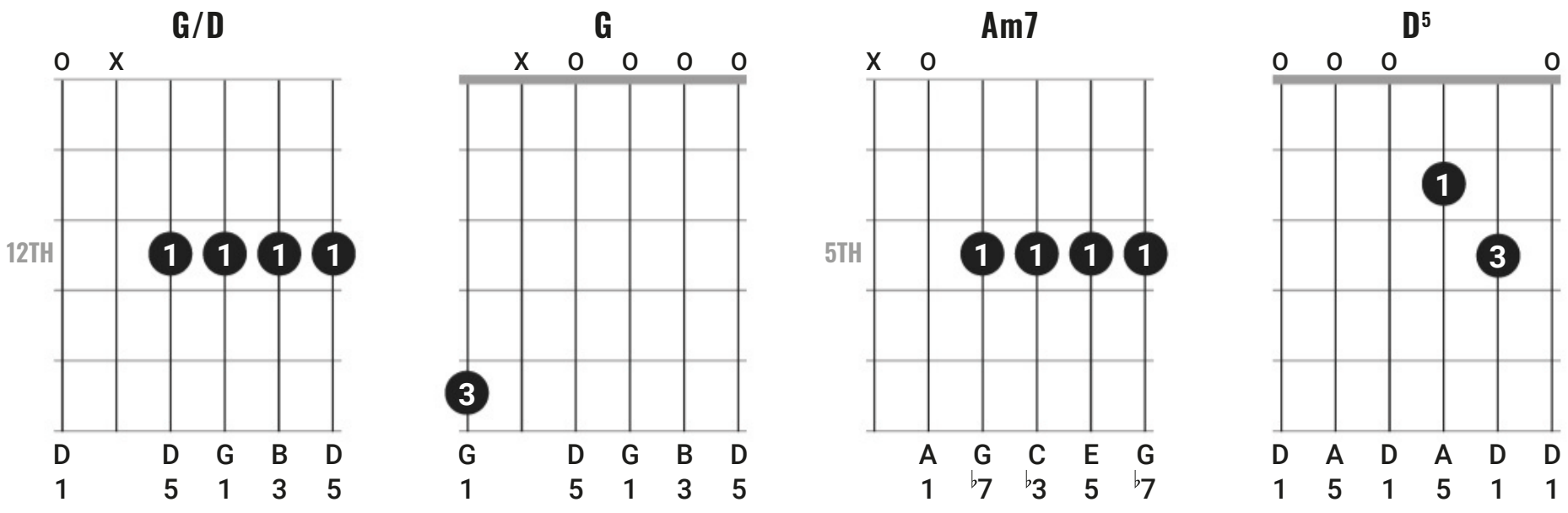


FIGURE 5

Pick the open E string and strum percussively at the 12th fret. You can use the tip of your index finger to mute the D string but you'll still require tidy strumming. Repeat the pattern using the open D string and the D chord at the 10th fret. This is an example of Young using two chords to create a repeatable riff. Focus on down strokes with your pick and try it with palm muting on the bass notes.

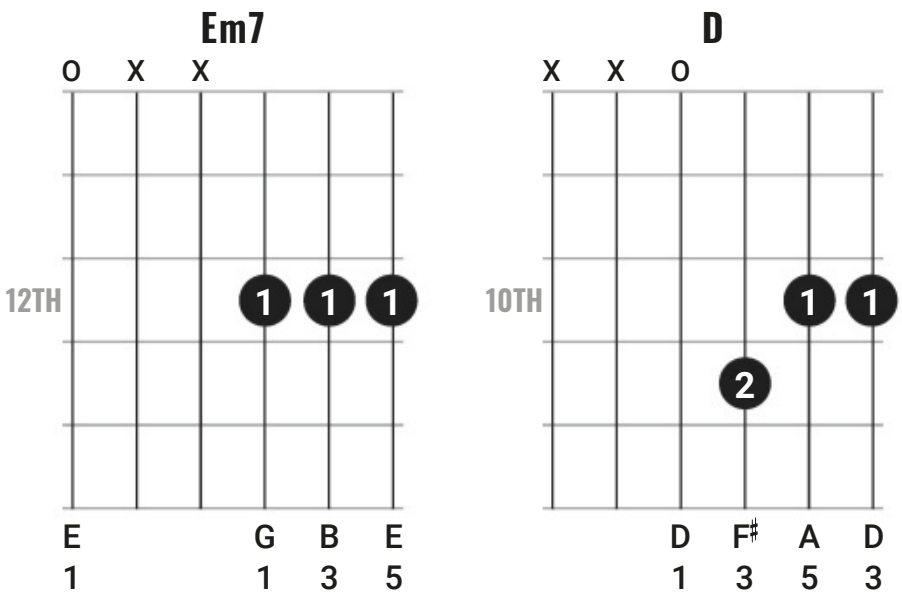


FIGURE 6

While Young is never likely to be classed as a blues artist, his music is full of blues inflections and occasionally overtly blues-like chord sequences. You could use the three chords here to make up a 12-bar blues in A; four bars of A7, two bars of D7, two bars of A7 and then E, D, A and E. Young is more likely to mess with the structure by playing eight bars alternating between A7 and D7 and then ending with four bars of E7 sharp ninth. Experiment and see what works for you.

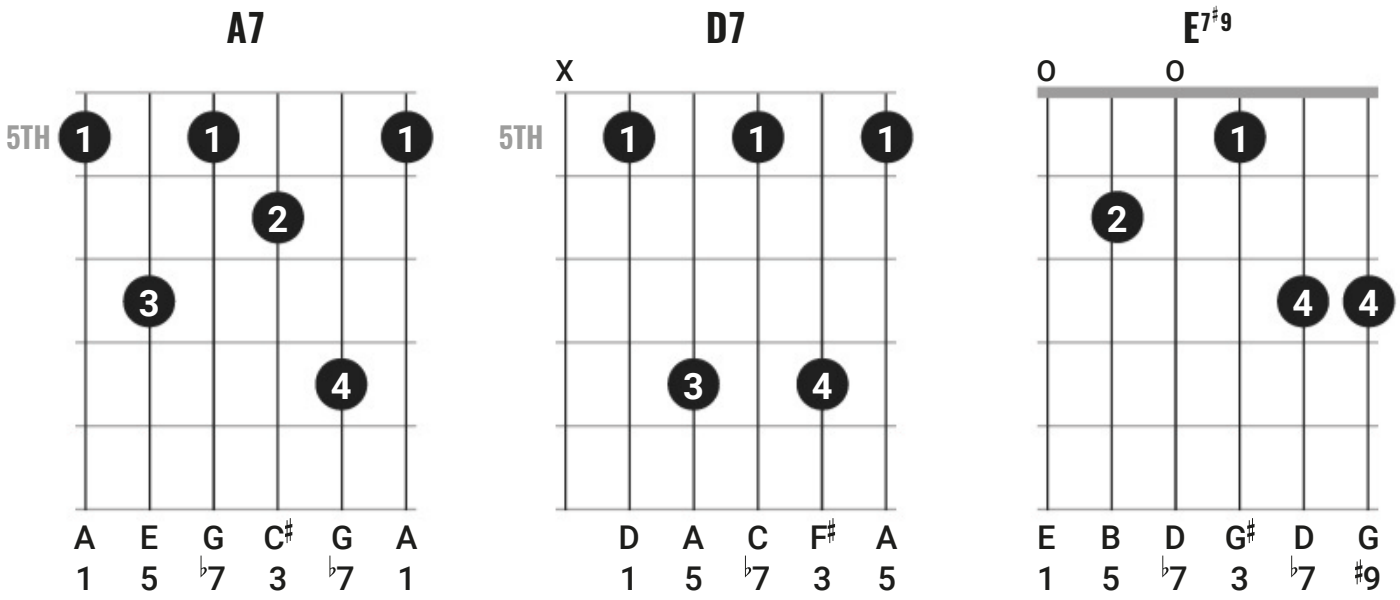
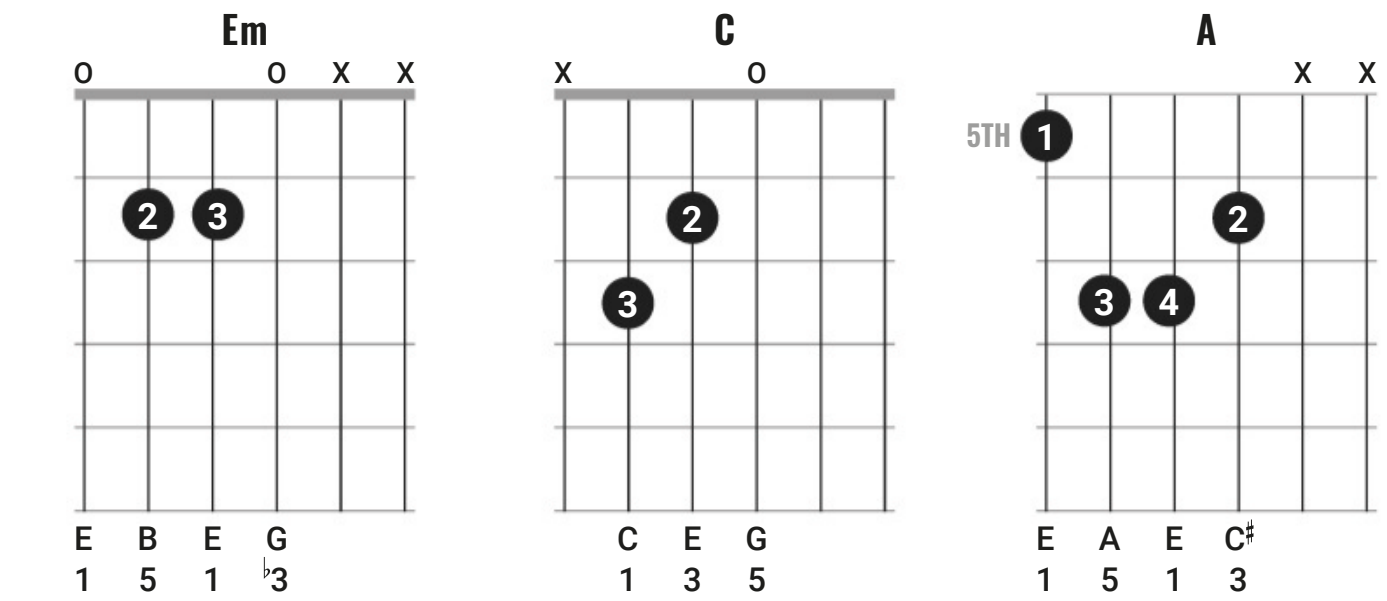


FIGURE 7

Much of Young's music is melancholy in tone and minor keys feature prominently, particularly E minor. We end our examples with a four-chord sequence: E minor, C and two bars of A. These otherwise standard chords have unusually dark-sounding and low voicings. Palm muting and a slow tempo will add to the subdued mood. Settle into the groove and repeat multiple times for the authentic Young vibe.



Massaad playing his signature Chapman ML3 BEA Baritone

TALKBOX

RABEA MASSAAD

He may be best known as a YouTube guitar star but Rabea Massaad has also forged a career as a guitar player in atmospheric prog outfit Toska. Here he talks about his love for Strats and sharing Portuguese wine with Nuno Bettencourt

The moment it all started...

"I was originally a drummer but then I injured my leg skateboarding and needed surgery. I was unable to play drums, so I found myself getting increasingly bored. My dad is a guitar player and he had all his gear in the garage. I dug out a guitar, which happened to be his late 1970s US Strat, and found myself falling in love with the instrument. I think having a good grasp of rhythm from drumming allowed me to keep time easier, which was a real blessing starting out. Then there were little things that helped me along the way, such as a plumber who heard me trying to play and recommended I listen to Metallica. I'd never heard of them, and he was so shocked that the next day he brought me a tab book. Not long after this, my dad noticed how keen I was on the instrument. He started trolling me, asking me to learn extreme solos – all in a supportive and loving way – but then he would continue to drop little knowledge bombs, such as using your pinky, something he never did and regretted."

I couldn't live without my...

"Other than a guitar, I guess it would probably be my Strymon Big Sky. I think that's quite a difficult one because I always feel like my desert-island guitar would be a Fender Strat, just because of how versatile they are. There are plenty of guitars and gear I feel I couldn't live without but I think just a good vibey guitar and some reverb would be enough."

The one that got away...

"A lot of my friends were in the habit of selling, buying and exchanging gear. I never really understood that, because I always pined for a certain piece of gear, then saved up and was able to get it. I think because of that, I had a sense of attachment to my gear and so, instead, I've ended up hoarding it all, which is why my studio is always getting cramped."

My signature model...

"Thankfully and very luckily, I might add, I do actually have a signature guitar. Thanks to Rob Chapman and the guys at Chapman Guitars for believing in me for such a long time. I've had the opportunity to design a guitar that encompasses everything I'm looking for, both visually or sonically. I'm in love with the Tele shape and have been for a few years. But I must say, my eyes are starting to twitch towards offset stuff. I think that's quite a way off though."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"I would probably strum a chord and do some bog-standard pentatonic licks, then I'd probably start playing something ambient and moody – or a fat riff."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"It was from Nuno Bettencourt, in the green room after we'd supported them in Luxembourg. Me and my dad were sat with him, sharing some of his Portuguese wine, and we were talking all things music and career. The advice he gave me was, 'Make no compromise, you'll miss weddings, funerals, anniversaries, birthdays. If you pursue the things in life that truly excite you, they'll reward you. Take no prisoners.'"

My guilty pleasure...

"I absolutely love Michael Jackson, though I don't know if it's a guilty pleasure. I guess I like well-written pop music. I love a lot of more recent pop artists too. I think they, or their writing teams, are on fire these days. Lots of good hooks and songwriting."

I'm in the band...

"I'd love to play in either Snarky Puppy, for the pure jams. I'd love to play with Karnivool too – that's a life goal."

I wish I was there...

"I reckon either Live Aid at Wembley or Polish Woodstock when Pantera played."

The first thing on my rider...

"A chef that can cook me anything. My lifestyle is a bit specific these days so it would be a massive benefit to have fresh cooked meals every show."

If I could just play one thing...

"I guess just being extra proficient in areas I try to play but don't do a great job of. Like blues or jazz fusion, anything playing over complex changes."

See more from Rabea via his YouTube channel: youtube.com/user/rabeaafro

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